

Political Affairs

Theoretical Journal, Communist Party USA, January 1997

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Report to the
National
Committee
by Gus Hall,
National Chair,
CPUSA

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- Industrial Concentration - *Webb*
- Labor & the Left - *Meyers*

- Election Victory - *Fishman*
- Election in Washington - *Brodine & Mangoang*
- Cuba Today - *Wheeler*



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Political Affairs

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Labor, the Class Struggle & the Party in a Moment of Great Change

Gus Hall

Change, both positive and negative, has been the dominant element in many areas of life since our last National Committee meeting in June 1996. This first meeting of our new national leadership set the stage for the Party's new level of involvement in the class struggle and its unique role in the '96 elections.

A few words about your contributions to this meeting. This could have been a totally collective product. Most leading comrades sent me their thinking. The problem was so many were very good, very long and very late.

This combination made it impossible to integrate as much as I would have liked to.

However, because so many letters are so good, we will propose that some be submitted as articles to *Political Affairs*.

Nevertheless, we did incorporate much of your thinking. So, if this report is long you comrades have to take your share of the collective criticism.

I don't think we have to spend much time going over the developments and events of the past election year. You have recently received reports and articles on the election results, the Party and the trade union movement, as well as an overall assessments of our work and leadership.

A copy of the opening to the November meeting of the full National Board was enclosed with my letter to you asking for input.

It carried an overall assessment of the Party in the elections, a serious discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Party, especially the Party leadership, as well as five main challenges for the post-election period.

Thus, we can say that overall 1996 was a year of both positive and negative changes.

For our Party it was a year of positive events and developments that are solid building blocks to build on for the coming year.

Our membership has grown. The Party is more active in mass forms of struggle. The overall influence and prestige and image of the Party has greatly

improved, including in the mass media and on the Internet.

The Party's relations with the trade union movement and other mass organizations are closer and stronger.

Perhaps most important, the majority of the Party is now actively involved in struggles, especially in strikes, strike solidarity, mass demonstrations, people's coalitions, alliances and movements.

In these struggles Communists are winning the respect and trust of not only local unions and trade union leaders, but also working-class communities where we worked in broad coalitions to defeat the ultra right.

Our mass recruiting shows we are on the threshold of building a mass Party, of redefining the concept of our Party as a mass, revolutionary Party and making the changes this necessitates.

We are now in a position, I think, to consider running some serious Communist candidates in local and state races in the 1998 elections.

We are ready to run candidates and win races because we have a larger support base, a larger constituency, a much larger Party.

Running candidates is a way not only to impact on elections, spread our views and sink roots, but to multiply our influence and membership much more quickly and massively than perhaps any other way, except the mass media. However, election campaigns force us to fight for mass media coverage.

The Party is also stronger in the area of theory and ideology. We do not have to start from scratch in our ideological work. We are an ideologically and philosophically united, Marxist-Leninist party, with a high-level, theoretically grounded leadership.

So the Party can now expand on the positive building blocks of the past year.

NOTHING IS THE SAME ■ We have been saying that nothing is the same since the elections. All political forces, organizations and movements have changed as a result of the struggles around the elections. With struggle and change comes changing patterns of thought.

To a great extent, the positive results of the elec-

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tions were a direct consequence of the profound changes in the trade union movement. In addition the people's movements, especially the African American, Latino and women's movements went through a qualitative change during the electoral struggles.

These forces were instrumental in blunting the aims of the ultra-right and fascist fringe. Together with labor they foiled the attempt to take over all three branches of government and continue the unrestrained implementation of the killer "Contract."

CHANGES IN THE WORKING CLASS ■ As a class, working people are going through the greatest changes in perhaps 20-25 years.

They are more anti-monopoly, anti-corporate and anti-establishment than ever before. Millions now see themselves as victims of a system that has betrayed their deepest needs and desires for a better life.

They see the monopoly corporations as the main enemy. They know that corporate America is out to destroy their jobs, their unions, their working conditions, their entitlements and a quality of life they believed would continue to improve for their children and grandchildren. These are lost illusions for millions. In larger numbers than ever before working and poor people now believe, "capitalism kills."

Thus, working-class patterns of thinking are going through radical changes, what we have been calling a "radicalization process." The new trade union movement is a result of this process.

The changed relations between the Party, the trade unions, working-class communities and mass organizations are a part of this process.

Radicalization has shaped new negative attitudes about capitalism as a system and about its two old parties. It has resulted in working people actively searching for radically new solutions.

And, it has directly resulted in people finding those solutions in the politics and ideology of our Party, and in people finding their political home in our Party.

Wherever and whenever we are out there and people are exposed to us, including on the Internet, we are winning people's hearts and minds.

Wherever and whenever we reach working people with ideas about "Bill of Rights" socialism, we are also winning them over to the idea that capitalism can be replaced by a better, more humane and

just socio-economic system.

This National Committee meeting should outline the politics of the new year for the Party.

We have the responsibility of outlining a plan for where to place our emphasis, focus, energies, resources, cadre and influence. It should outline new approaches, new tactics.

Perhaps more than ever we have to develop a guide to action for a period that is profoundly different, a new time when all conditions and forces are changing.

MONOPOLY CAPITAL ■ At the same time, monopoly capital has *not* changed its basic orientation: to destroy the trade unions, all social programs and entitlements by using every weapon in its formidable arsenal to force the working class, poor and oppressed to carry the full weight of its multiple crises.

In its drive to accelerate monopolization, the main instrument is a whole array of schemes to privatize everything that is still publicly owned or controlled, to turn everything over to private ownership and maximum corporate profits.

In the government, Gingrich is their main man. That is why the ruling class went all out, even incurring the wrath of popular sentiment, to save him. Because he is their creature. Even as "damaged goods" he will do their corporate bidding, with relish, and force his political operatives to do the same.

The words "Contract with America" have all but disappeared from their public speeches. But its essence is still the main topic in the smoke-filled rooms. They have not given up the Contract. The tactics will change and become more subtle and more stealth-like but the goals will not. Thus, the struggle continues in a new stage.

There is a new level of corporate-monopoly domination of the government. To see this clearly all we have to do is look at what the new Clinton government looks like so far. Many of the old Clinton cabinet members have already left government service and returned to serve monopoly, the big corporations they originally came from four years ago.

While in the Clinton cabinet they served the same corporate masters they now go back to serve directly, only their salaries will be much bigger.

The new members of the president's cabinet are going to be servants of some of the same corporations as the outgoing members.

These politicians not only represent big business

in general. They represent specific sections, specific interests and specific corporations of monopoly capital.

For example, the foreign policy and military decisions are made based on how they affect the profits of specific corporations like Boeing, (which just swallowed up McDonnell Douglas).

State-monopoly capital has become an ever more powerful force. There are very few big corporations that do not have some business relationships with the government by way of special government contracts. This has made government contracts, government-related political posts key to monopoly profits.

MONOPOLIZATION ■ State-monopoly-capital is continuing to tighten its monopoly control in every area of life. Monopoly control starts with ever tighter control of industrial production. The process of the bigger swallowing the smaller is accelerating. Mergers are still rampant in just about every area.

Karl Marx's prediction becomes ever truer as specific lines of capitalist production are controlled by one or two corporations. For example, the mass media is now under total monopoly control. With the development of advanced computer technology there is a growing monopoly control of the flow of information. Every phase of our culture is now under monopoly control.

There is a growing monopoly control of all medical institutions, which includes hospitals, clinics, research facilities and a whole system of Health Management Organizations (HMOs).

Higher education is increasingly controlled by monopoly. And public education is threatened with privatization, vouchers and "charter schools."

This monopolization has taken hold in just about every area of life. Mergers and acquisitions in 1996 doubled the number of mergers in the biggest year of the merger-mania '80s. The biggest year was in 1988, with a total of \$350 billion. Deals in '96 totaled a whopping \$658.8 billion, up from a record \$519 billion the year before. That's enough to give about \$2,500 to every man, woman and child in the U.S.

The biggest mergers were in telecommunications, including the proposed Bell Atlantic merger with NYNEX. Deregulation has been a powerful incentive for mergers, especially in the telecommunications, utilities, radio and TV broadcasting fields.

Increasing corporate concentration leads to

increasing conglomerization of the economy on a world scale.

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC TRENDS ■ In a recent report, the World Federation of Trade Unions, said that the concentration of economic power in a relatively small number of corporations should stand as a "stern warning."

The WFTU report said that while the sales of the top 200 transnationals is equal to more than a quarter of the world's economic activity, their combined global employment is only 18.8 million, less than 1 percent of the world's work force.

The report says, "The top five firms have more than 30 percent of global sales in airlines, aerospace, steel, oil, personal computers, chemicals, and the media." And, "Overall, corporate profits have jumped 75 percent from 1990 to 1995."

It is ironic that unions had to fight for some ten years to win a \$4.50 minimum wage while General Electric tries to cover up the fact that last year it made profits that amount to a million dollars an hour, for every hour of the year.

WFTU warned that there is a "real danger of a 'backlash' to a globalization that has brought with it unprecedented unemployment and the alarming growth of poverty, inequality and exclusion."

Globalization is a method of transnational corporate domination of whole economies and countries to milk them of human and natural resources through severe exploitation, low wages, unbearable, anti-union working conditions and 17th century child labor.

International corporations break strikes by using plants located throughout the world to maintain productive capacity and fill orders.

In the U.S. there is a growing, expanding anti-monopoly sentiment. The majority of working and poor people recognize the monopoly corporations as evil, greedy and responsible for their unemployment, insecurity, poverty and inequality.

This majority anti-monopoly sentiment, however, is not yet a politicized, organized force. However, the necessary key ingredient, the labor movement, is now positioned to organize this anti-corporate sentiment.

Because of the acceleration of these processes, the working class and its unions face not only new issues, but new kinds of issues

The process of monopolization has been going on for some 100 years. This process has been the

vehicle not only for the bigger corporations to take over smaller companies, but also weaker ones.

Monopolization has been used to overcome some serious problems that arose under capitalism. But this is now coming to an end because increasingly in many areas there are no more smaller or weaker corporations left to take over. This creates a whole new and very serious problem for monopoly capital – and, for the working class.

PRIVATIZATION ■ In one industry after another, what is left after mega-mergers, acquisitions and takeovers, bank and corporate mergers is one or two mega-corporations.

The main vehicle for increasing monopolization is privatization. The drive to privatize includes education, hospitals, schools, prisons, sanitation, public transportation, postal services, social services, welfare, social security, etc.

The privatization process is changing the role of the state under state-monopoly capitalism. The state loses any semblance of independence. The state becomes increasingly a profit-making vehicle for the corporations.

In all of this the struggle over what is left of state control, public and cooperative ownership becomes more important.

However, privatization faces the same eventual kind of dead end. True, there is still some room for continued privatizing, but not much. For example, in the prison system so far 65,000 prisoners out of 1,500,000 are in privatized prisons.

There is still some room for privatization of hospitals, public education, social and public services like welfare, transit, parks, sanitation.

And, of course, globalization makes more room for further privatization. But that will also come to a dead end in the not too distant future.

There are other processes which are contributing to new crises.

Corporate policies of downsizing, of closing plants and mass layoffs, the policy of moving towards a contingent workforce continue unabated.

Add the exodus of whole industries to more profitable locations, massively destroying jobs and communities, the rapidly declining consumer buying power (overproduction), falling wages and new industrial technology that increasingly replaces human labor.

And we must add the over 4 trillion dollar government and private debt.

We have to include the crisis of no new reinvestment in plants, machinery and technology. Add to all these, the crisis of our country's infrastructure, our cities and environment and the deteriorating overall quality of living.

The combination of complicated old and new contradictions are fast becoming unresolvable. All these eventually unresolvable dead-end processes are presenting a new set of problems for the working class and trade unions.

The new problems call for radical changes in the structure and organization of the trade unions, including international solidarity. It is clear that the class struggle will become more sharp and more direct.

Thus, the general, systemic crisis of capitalism deepens, with a combination of some old and new conditions.

To alleviate the crisis monopoly capital could have chosen the path of concessions: increase entitlements, welfare and social services; pass an emergency public works Martinez jobs bill; make necessary capital investments and transfer some excessive wealth from the filthy rich to the jobless and poor.

Following its natural instincts, state monopoly capital did just the opposite. It chose the path of the so-called "Gingrich revolution" and the "Contract on America." Under the guise of "balancing the budget" the real goal is to continue shrinking the government and turn over more and more control of the state to monopoly, to abolish the very concept of government responsibility for public welfare, continue deregulation, eliminate democratic and workers' rights and increasingly merge the interests of state with monopoly capital and corporate profits. In this way, corporate America thinks it can stop the decay of capitalism.

I think it is correct to ask how will capitalism survive monopolization, globalization, privatization, downsizing, technology replacing human hands and \$1 million an hour corporate profits. That is what corporate America, capitalism and the class struggle are going to face in the near future.

THE ECONOMY & THE QUIET DEPRESSION ■ One of the biggest hoaxes on the American people is that the economy is in great shape, that things have rarely ever been better, that our economic future is secure. Clinton's people recite over and over, statistic after statistic, to convince us that we never had it so good.

But this is a tough sell to the many millions at the bottom of the economic lifeline. The nearly 40 million people who live in poverty are understandably suspicious of such claims. The 30 million who earn less than \$7.50 an hour also find this hard to swallow. The millions who are part-time, contingent and contract labor are skeptical of the good news. The millions of workers whose paychecks have been stagnant or declining for two decades are also not yet ready to believe that they never had it so good.

Mothers moving from welfare to workfare are not buying the notion that the U.S. is a fabulous job-creating machine. More of the real not-so-good news is that the economic gap between rich and poor is widening. The 20-25 year decline in real wages continues, a decline that is now steepest in the higher-paying jobs. All signs indicate the decline will continue in the new year.

In spite of these facts, Federal Reserve's Allan Greenspan, admitting we have just come through a long period of "small wage increases," warns corporate America that "the central bank sees a strong possibility of larger wage increases starting to fuel rising prices later in the year, which the Federal Reserve is determined to squelch."

Greenspan always keeps his eye on corporate profits. He knows that keeping wages down means bigger surplus value, and bigger profits.

The number of jobs will continue to decline, including basic industrial jobs. There is no growth in public sector, civil service government jobs. There will be some increase in welfare-related, "workfare" jobs, which will be non-union, below-poverty level, no-benefit, dead-end jobs.

APPEARANCE & ESSENCE ■ It is true that the economy has been growing for the last two quarters. It is also true that overall unemployment is now at 5.6 percent, down from over 7 percent.

So, on the surface it appears that the economy is in better shape.

But we know that appearance is only one aspect of reality, which to the unsuspecting eye can hide and distort the inner-essence of phenomena. Thus, Communists must penetrate beneath appearances to get at the underlying processes that are shaping the economy.

If we do that we must say that neither cyclical or structural crises have been overcome. We can also say that great imbalances and instability exist in the economy.

We must also say that U.S. capitalism has *not* overcome the long-term slowdown in economic growth that overtook it in the early 1970s.

ECONOMIC CRISES ■ There have been other moments when our nation's bourgeois economic specialists claimed that the U.S. economy was entering a golden age. They did in the late 1920s, in the 1930s and again in the 1960s. But in all these instances deep crises followed. They were overcome only after the militant actions of tens of millions.

I am not necessarily saying that a new economic crisis is knocking at our front door. But I am saying that it is definitely in our front yard.

First of all, we haven't overcome the last crisis. Despite the cyclical upswing, many problems from the previous crisis remain unresolved. Wages lag behind production and profits, a gap that will grow wider, at least in the short term. And, long-term layoffs continue unabated in nearly every sector of the economy.

I can't resist the temptation to insert here a bitter irony of capitalist politics. Senator D'Amato's special Senate committee spent some \$20 million and two years investigating the firing of seven White House employees. But not one penny was spent by any Congressional committee on investigating the downsizing of 40 million jobs.

Our focus as a Communist Party has to be on the longer-term processes in the economy and the conditions of life of our class, our people.

Capitalism has not overcome its laws and contradictions. They continue to operate in a new setting. Thus, while we should not ignore temporary and momentary shifts in the economy which are important especially in a tactical sense, we should not give them greater significance than they deserve. Nor should we lose sight of the main direction and underlying trends of the economy. For example, the new problems arising from processes like monopolization, conglomerization, privatization, discussed earlier.

It is this economic reality that should weigh most heavily in our assessments of the economy, that should determine our political priorities and tactics.

It is this economic reality that should underlie our policy of industrial concentration, determine our Communist plus and lend a boldness to our initiating struggles and movements on the immediate daily crisis of living issues. In practice, our focus in

the months ahead should be on the economic issues and struggles:

- the fight for higher wages;
- organizing the unorganized;
- the fight against gutting welfare and food stamps, Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security;
- the fight to save public education, etc.
- the fight for the Martinez Public Works Jobs bill.

RACISM & THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY ■ In the African American community the crisis of every day living has reached new depths. Corporate downsizing, which is wreaking havoc in the lives of millions of working families, has been a problem in the African American community for a generation, since the structural crisis first hit in the 1970s.

Half of all African American children live in poverty. Unemployment in most inner cities is now three to four times the national average. African Americans have the highest infant mortality rate in the country. Most African Americans live in segregated neighborhoods and have to send their children to segregated schools, 40 years after Brown versus the Board of Education.

The main problems are persistent long term unemployment, discrimination in hiring and promotions, low wages and a steady decline in health care and other government services.

These overall conditions do not fundamentally change, even when the overall economy improves. These conditions are a national scandal and cry out for the most urgent attention.

The recent exposes of the raw racism practiced in the highest quarters of corporate America is a stark reminder that the main source and the main forces that benefit from racist oppression in America is the racist capitalist ruling class.

With the implementation of the welfare bill, on top of the ongoing crisis conditions in the African American community, the quality of life will drastically deteriorate further.

We have to say that as a Party we are not addressing the critical problems confronting the African American people. The African American Equality Commission recently met and made some good proposals for action that will help change the character of our work. The Commission proposes that we develop a grass roots action program on the Martinez Bill. The first phase is to work for the maximum sponsorship of the bill by visiting local mem-

bers of Congress.

While we have signed up hundreds of African Americans into the Party, most have not been activated or consolidated, as yet. Club activities around the fight for public works jobs is a main key to activating them.

February is African American History month. Here in New York, on February 23, the New York district is planning an evening of African American culture to celebrate the 129th birthday of Comrade W.E.B. Du Bois.

The national African American Equality Commission recommends that every district aim to hold such events during February. This also fits in very well with meeting fund drive quotas and activating new members.

The Party must strive for a more active, visible presence in the African American community. We have a vital contribution to make.

RACISM & THE LATINO COMMUNITY □ The anti-Mexican, anti-Latino agenda of the ultra-right is centered in its anti-immigrant legislation. The immigration and welfare bills are both killers. They doom immigrants to a life of exploitation, repression, fear and deprivation.

Over \$20 billion of the \$55 billion in welfare cuts will be cuts in desperately needed funds for "legal" immigrants. The denial of food stamps and other life-saving welfare benefits will cause massive hunger and homelessness in the Latino community, which now faces a national poverty rate of almost 31 percent and depression-level unemployment.

In the coming period we must up the ante in the struggle for equal rights for immigrant workers, documented or not. We must up the ante against sweatshop and child labor, of which Latinos make up the largest component. We must up the ante in the struggle for Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Latino equality and against the attacks on welfare, affirmative action and bilingual education.

The new Latino political clout should be welcomed and built upon. It signals a historic change which will have ramifications not only for Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans and all Latinos but will strengthen the working-class and people's struggles overall.

Latinos now have better leverage against the ultra-right agenda. Even California's Governor Wilson, well aware of his upcoming reelection campaign, acted out of character by pulling back from

his demand that prenatal care be denied immigrant women.

Mexican American and Puerto Rican voters, who are the majority component of the Latino vote, and who are over 90 percent working class, vote overwhelmingly in support of labor, African American, women's, people's and Latino issues. Latinos voted overwhelmingly against the ultra-right, against the anti-affirmative action Proposition 209 and for increasing the minimum wage.

Loretta Sanchez's election is more than a Mexican American victory or Latino victory. It is an all people's, anti-racist victory. It marks a historic turning point away from decades of ultra-right domination in a national Republican Party stronghold.

This achievement will open the door for more labor and people's victories on every front in Orange County. The fact that ultra-right and Dornan forces are still seriously trying to overturn the election results shows the universal importance of this victory.

The Latino March on Washington, which drew tens of thousands from all over the country, marked the first time that Latinos demonstrated at our nation's capitol. The turnout of tens of thousands of Latinos, in unity with representatives of the AFL-CIO and many elected officials, was a positive beginning for more national initiatives and protests.

The new national Latino clout will enhance national efforts of every kind. It will strengthen Black, Brown, white unity, all-people's unity and the efforts of the labor movement to organize the unorganized.

The new leverage, along with increased unity with the labor movement, African Americans, women, seniors, youth, is necessary to fight the anti-Mexican, anti-immigrant, anti-Latino ultra-right agenda.

WORKING-CLASS UNITY ■ The first step in advancing the struggle for equality is to repeal the Welfare Reform Bill and anti-immigrant legislation. The State of the Union speech which will be more of a policy speech will show where Clinton is really heading. Either way, political pressure from the grass roots will be necessary to force positive change.

The strong showing of the African American and Latino voters united with labor has helped place the right on the defensive and given new momentum to the struggle for equality. Black,

Brown and white unity was advanced overall in the process of the election struggle last year.

The passage of Proposition 209, is a serious setback, although it has been challenged in the courts. The defeat of Harvey Gant was also a setback, despite the coalition of labor, Black and white forces working for him.

However, this is a most difficult electoral struggle. Outside of Illinois, no African American has been elected to the U.S. Senate since the 1960s.

The successful reelection of Cynthia McKinney and Sanford Bishop in Georgia and Corrine Brown in Florida all of whom were redistricted shows what is possible today even in the deep South, with the unity of labor and the African American people. This alliance is deepening in the South and can bring about new victories for civil rights and labor organizing in that critical region of the country.

The Republican campaigns were designed to appeal to racist sentiments and to divide. Everything was done to convince white voters that their interests lie in massive cuts in taxes and social services, along with ending affirmative action and anti-immigrant measures.

The fact that the Republicans suffered a setback is very important. Over all the last election showed a heightened rejection of racism by white working people.

The AFL-CIO readiness to organize low-wage workers, who are disproportionately racially and nationally oppressed, immigrant and women workers, will strengthen unity in every sense.

The same can be said with regard to labor's efforts to diversify its own leadership, in terms of race and gender. Also, labor's new emphasis on labor-community coalitions creates a better climate to fight for unity.

At the same time, the realization by labor's allies that go-it-alone approaches are self-destructive is another factor that adds to the unity process.

In a general sense, tens of millions of American people are coming to the conclusion that division along racial, ethnic, gender and other lines is not in their interests nor in the interests of the country. Clinton's inaugural speech reflected this shift in public opinion.

All this shows that perhaps more than ever we can say we have an anti-racist majority in the United States today.

We are in a period where labor is on the move and building strategic alliances with civil rights,

women, youth, seniors and environmentalists. In this atmosphere the struggle for equality can be greatly advanced.

The people's movements must take up the fight against the welfare bill. It is a cornerstone of the ultra-right program.

It is now law and has bipartisan support. This bill is nothing short of a massive cut in welfare leading to its ultimate elimination. This brutal bill mandates the shredding of the safety net leaving millions at the total mercy of capitalism. If something is not done to repeal it the consequences for our nation will be catastrophic for millions of working-class families.

This bill will negatively effect the lives of most working people. For children and the racially and nationally oppressed the impact will be nothing less than a national disaster.

We have to point an accusing finger at those who passed this bill for the New Jersey mother who just killed her three children and then herself because she was at the end of her welfare rope.

The cut in federal money, putting the states in control and placing a mandatory time limit on benefits will leave millions of families without any income - it will leave millions with no food stamps and no way of surviving.

The ranks of the hungry, homeless and destitute will swell. The number of neglected and abused children and adults will increase. Without benefits people will become more desperate. The chaos on the streets will get worse and the prisons will be filled with more poor and oppressed victims of capitalism.

In the African American and Latino communities, these conditions will be a death sentence for new millions who will be without adequate food, shelter and heat.

This winter, which has been extremely harsh especially in the Midwest, hundreds have already died. Hundreds more will die. And, this is before the full impact of the welfare bill.

Here in New York, like most of the country, there is a heat and homeless crisis. The heat complaint bureau registered 9,000 heat complaints over one weekend alone. Last Monday two small children died in a fire in Newark because their house was being heated by the kitchen stove.

The city is picking up thousands of homeless on the streets of New York City in this frigid weather. They are forcing the homeless to go to the shelters

where they are robbed, abused and in some cases murdered. This is an emergency and something must be done.

Workfare and the slave labor wages that will be paid to those forced to work for their food stamps and measly checks is a threat to the standard of living and job security of every working person. Unions must organize the workfare workers to demand they be paid union wages and benefits.

The AFL-CIO is committed to the fight against the welfare bill. We have to show, however, that it is not possible to win this fight without an all-out struggle against racism.

MARTINEZ PUBLIC WORKS JOBS BILL ■ The fight for the Martinez bill is even more important with the passage of the welfare bill. The fight for public works jobs at union wages and with affirmative action is an offensive response to the massive cut in welfare. This bill can potentially win the support of the majority if organized in a broad way.

The building of a national movement to pass the emergency \$250 billion public works jobs bill has now become a matter of life or death. Only the passage of this bill can prevent massive hunger and homelessness in every area of our country, which will inevitably develop as a result of the cutbacks in welfare and the horrendous anti-immigrant bill.

The potential for building such a national movement is evident in the rising demand for jobs which can be heard from every poor people's organization.

This is evident in the response that the Labor Coalition for Public Works Jobs, based in Los Angeles, gets as it organizes support for the bill in cities across the nation, and as it works to build a national coalition. New York can now be added to that list.

Comrade Evelina Alarcon, who is now the national Party coordinator for the Martinez Jobs Bill will give a more detailed report on this fight.

But let me say that the objective situation calls for us to work in a totally different way to organize to get this bill passed. We must work in an emergency way to meet the emergency crisis situation.

The new year is not a month old, but there are already some unprecedented happenings in U.S. politics.

The rush to reelect the unpopular, "damaged" Newt Gingrich as Speaker of the House, even before the report of the ethics probe, is just such an event. Keep in mind, the Speaker of the House is third in line to the presidency.

One of the specific charges is that Gingrich stole hundreds of millions from charity organizations, money that contributors thought they were giving to help poor children, especially poor African American children. And when he was charged with this outright thievery, he lied to Congress.

In reelecting Gingrich to this high position of public trust, the House returned to power one of the most openly reactionary, corrupt and dishonest politicians in our country.

Although he acknowledged that he stole and misused public funds and lied to Congress for two years, his most serious crimes have not yet been disclosed.

As expected, Gingrich got off with a slap on the wrist, and a \$300,000 penalty, which you can bet will *not* come out of his pocket.

However, when it comes to corruption the Democrats are not far behind. Clinton and the Democratic Party have admitted to big-time robbery and corruption on a world scale.

Some of the highway robbery and corruption has come to light only because there was such fierce partisan confrontation between the two opposing parties and candidates in the electoral arena.

On the other hand, all the current talk about "bipartisanship," especially in the media and in Clinton's inaugural speech, underlies the danger of deals between the right-wing Gingrich GOP leadership and the right-wing Democratic leadership, such as schemes to privatize Social Security funds and turn them over to Wall Street, stepped up attacks on Medicaid and Medicare, welfare and affirmative action.

The main source and motivation for the corruption is monopoly capital itself. Capitalism is a thieving, corrupt, inhuman economic system. As it decays everything it touches begins to go bad.

THE ELECTIONS ■ The big event of 1996 was of course the presidential elections. There were some very important new voting patterns that emerged.

The biggest change was the new role of the trade unions. They literally changed the relationship between bourgeois elections and the class struggle.

Because of the very poorly run campaigns by the Democratic candidates, the trade unions became the main opposition force against the ultra-right Republican candidates. They were the most active, best organized force in the elections.

In spite of the special efforts by the Republicans,

including the work of Colin Powell and other African American personalities, the great majority of the African American community voted against the Gingrich candidates.

The biggest shift in voting patterns was the very high anti-right-wing vote of the Latino communities.

Another big change was the huge majority of women who voted against the right-wing Republicans.

These voting blocks defeated many of the fascist-leaning candidates. And of course they defeated Dole-Kemp. These voting and thinking patterns of mainly working-class people must become the basic pattern for the policies and tactics of our mass work.

Most of the third-party candidates had two sides, negative and positive. In some cases they had the effect of helping to elect right-wing candidates. This was because they rejected the idea of electing the lesser of two evils.

The other positive side was that they did express the overall growth of political independence.

The accelerating growth of political independence has reached a level where in future elections it will be possible to run third-party candidates to win.

Whatever differences we had with other progressive and left forces during the elections are over. And the lesser-evil tactic does not apply after the elections.

Post-election tactics should be based on policies of a united front on unity in struggle. This includes a united front tactic in the trade union movement, in the area of independent political action, in the struggle against racism, against chauvinism. We should work for united front relations in the struggles of the unemployed and homeless, in building a movement to win the Martinez jobs legislation, in the struggles against privatization, to save public education and the environment, in all the struggles and movements of the people.

THE PARTY ■ Just as we take a fresh look at everything in the new year, the Party also has to take a fresh look at itself.

It is always much more difficult to look at our own weaknesses. It is much easier to recognize and discuss the weaknesses in others, for example in the trade union and people's movements.

And, when we do look at ourselves it is so much

easier to discuss the many positive aspects of our work. But that would not be the whole picture.

It is even more difficult to analyze why we have our weaknesses and to come up with solutions to eliminate them to improve and change.

In my opening to the full National Board in November I tried to candidly discuss some of the weaknesses and flaws in our work and leadership, including the concept of a "Communist personality." Several comrades have written that they found this especially helpful in their year-end reviews of their work and leadership.

INDUSTRIAL CONCENTRATION ■ However, here I want us to take a look at what I consider one of our more serious weaknesses, the backsliding in industrial concentration.

We have to honestly admit that there are few areas where special emphasis is placed on the working class in general and even less where there is a special focus on industrial workers.

This weakness results in the reality that we do not have nearly enough workers in our Party membership and thus in our leadership bodies. Although we have recently added workers to this body and to the National Board, there are still not nearly enough. The lack of working-class cadre shows up in how we work, in how we deal with class struggle issues.

In a sense we have to restart and reestablish industrial concentration. However, we have said that a number of times in the past. Today, I want to reformulate our approach to industrial concentration.

It is not the Party that must reestablish industrial concentration – the leadership, the leading bodies, that must take responsibility for it.

The leadership must decide what industries and shops we should concentrate on. The leadership must decide who will be involved in this work. The leadership must draft a plan for concentration. This plan must be based on specifics, not generalities. It must include a system of checkup and followup.

The new industrial concentration plan must reflect the new objective and subjective factors in the class struggle.

For example, how we carry on the specific work of concentration must take into account such things as privatization, downsizing and outsourcing of industries. We must take into consideration the new level of technology, the increasing monopoly control of the state.

And of course we cannot develop a new policy of concentration without taking into account the new trade union policies and the new level of relations between the Party and the trade union leadership.

There are two sides to these new relations. On the one side, it is possible to work with the trade union movement on the level of their struggles. On the other, it is necessary for the Party to conduct political and ideological struggles that are on a higher level than trade union struggles, even the more militant class struggles. We should cultivate both.

It is true the new 1997 AFL-CIO program is very strong, with a few exceptions. It will greatly increase the potential for political independence and lay the basis for a labor-led, anti-monopoly party. It is important for our Party to do all we can to help implement this program.

However, important as this work is we must not allow ourselves to become consumed by trade union work to the point where we forget and neglect the Communist plus.

Besides working with the trade union movement the Party must conduct struggles on the level of the Communist plus. And of course we have to conduct agitation and propaganda about the basic nature of the class struggle and about socialism.

If we carry out our responsibilities correctly in relation to the two sides of our relations there need not be any contradiction between them.

A Communist can simultaneously be a good trade union leader, an advanced strike leader and at the same time an advocate of socialism, especially "Bill of Rights" socialism.

It should be clear to all of us by now that there is a distinct decline in anti-Communism, especially in the trade union movement, which makes it much easier to conduct all sides of the class struggle. However, this does not mean that workers are no longer afraid of losing their jobs, especially in today's circumstances of no job security. We have to change how we conduct our work in the new objective situation. Then, we have to put it into practice. We have to study how we work, how we carry it out – we have to learn from experience.

I think we all agree that trade union leaders are much more willing to work with Communists. However, we should not expect all trade union leaders to adopt all the policies of the Party.

Most of the trade union leaders are not yet ready to become advocates of socialism. But, they

will join with us on just about all questions related to the class struggle.

We should be very aware that workers in general, and trade union leaders in particular, evaluate our Party based on what we contribute to the class struggle, what we contribute to tactics, unity, picket-lines, and election campaigns. Workers will join will join the Party mainly on the basis of what we do to make their struggle more effective.

We have to develop special approaches to recruiting workers. This should include the method of setting up recruiting tables. But we should find ways of setting them up in working-class areas, where workers live, where workers shop or go to movies, outside sports stadiums, outside bars or union halls.

Party shop papers are a necessary part of recruiting shop workers. Clubs and districts have to develop all kinds of methods like holding birthday parties, wedding and anniversary celebrations, Christmas and New Year's events.

Friends are a good basis for recruiting. But to have friends, we have to be friendly. And, for whatever reason, we are not friendly or neighborly enough.

The regular circulation of the *People's Weekly World* creates a good basis for recruiting. We should know that it takes more time to convince workers to join the Communist Party. We have to win workers to our politics and ideology. And, again, although anti-Communism has declined, workers still fear losing their jobs.

Lenin once said that workers pick up on ideology and theory slowly, in fact so slowly that non-workers think they are not changing at all.

On the difficult question of how workers change, we should also discuss some old questions in the framework of the new times. Old questions like, "What holds production workers back?" might not be the right question now. Maybe what we have to ask is, How do we show production workers that they need to be in the Communist Party.

Maybe in this period the Party doesn't stand out enough in the shops as different enough, with a different role and goals. Maybe we seem too much like the labor militants in the shop, with nothing that distinguishes us to offer. This is a risky question to raise because the easiest way some see to distinguish ourselves is to be critical of the labor leadership. But there are many ways to demonstrate our "plus" without being unnecessarily critical of labor

leadership.

EXAMPLE OF OUR DISTINGUISHING PLUS ■ We see international solidarity in class terms. Shouldn't our trade unionists be prominently pushing solidarity with the South Korean workers? It's an open door. But even open doors have to be pushed open and the light turned on!

Same thing can be said on proposing advanced solutions. No one is making the argument for nationalization right now because it seems far-fetched when privatization and downsizing are rampant. Nor is anyone championing shorter hours. I think we should be.

I want to make the argument that well-thought-out propaganda for advanced demands and solutions will have a much wider reception in the new situation. There is a radicalization happening in shops all around the country and many workers' minds are now wide open.

Thousands of shop workers are in a thinking mode as mass layoffs, downsizing and privatizing closes in on them. They are trying to piece things together, looking for new ways to understand and fight back.

Concentration should include helping to set the agenda for thought on the shop floor. Our newspaper, pamphlets, leaflets and shop papers can do that.

Given all this how should we approach club concentration plans? Every club should be able to find a way to be a live, vital factor in the class struggle.

For one club it might mean joining a labor-led coalition to pass a city referendum in support of a living wage. For another club it might mean assisting a campaign to organize low-wage workers in its neighborhood. For still another club it might mean entering the political action arena with labor and its allies to elect a people's candidate for elective office. And for every club it means reaching workers with our Communist plus and bringing them into our Party.

We should remind ourselves that just a year or two ago, we couldn't make such projections. Labor then was dominated by a right-wing leadership who were class collaborationist and kept people's organizations at a distance.

Kirkland sat on his hands as the ruling class dismantled entitlement programs, tore up contracts, and busted strikes.

That is behind us now. The new labor move-

ment has shifted the terrain of struggle. Inaction and timid words have given way to militant struggle. Go-it-alone policies have given way to broad coalitions. Virulent anti-Communism has given way to a readiness to work with the left.

Thus our policy of concentration now unfolds in a new context. The opportunities are nearly limitless. We have a window of opportunity to breathe new life into our policy and practice of industrial concentration.

But, as we know from experience, windows do not stay open forever. We have to move quickly. We need new plans that correspond to this new situation – to the new thought patterns among workers, to the initiatives of the new labor movement, to the new level of class struggle.

Our plans have to be more ambitious. They have to be bolder and more creative. They have to involve every club and every Communist. They have to place a higher priority on the Communist plus and recruiting workers into our Party. They have to adjust our initiatives, tactics and Communist plus to the new stage of the class struggle.

For example:

- Shouldn't every club find a way to connect to one or another struggle of the labor movement?

- Shouldn't every district organize workers' schools for leading activists in the labor movement?

- Shouldn't every district and club develop a special list of workers to whom we regularly send material?

- Shouldn't we aim to triple the number of workers who read our paper?

- Shouldn't we organize a recruiting drive to bring workers – Black, Brown, and white – into our Party?

- Shouldn't we call special membership meetings in every district to discuss ways to implement industrial concentration?

- Shouldn't every commission discuss its role in applying our concentration policy?

NEW CLUB INITIATIVES ■ I have discussed the following ideas before, but they didn't click. Maybe they will now in the context of an even more serious crisis looming in the immediate future.

There is more than ever a desperate need for local, community organizing of the unemployed, homeless, hungry people and families.

Millions more, including young children, are facing loss of welfare checks, food stamps, rent con-

trol, health care and continuing layoffs. They are facing hunger, homelessness, joblessness, illness. They are desperate and angry. And they are mainly unorganized in their communities.

They would respond to a call for militant struggle and fightback of all kinds on a regular, daily basis. There is a crying need for forms that will bring people together to fight for the right to live and to work on a local level.

Our clubs should immediately take steps to initiate the formation of such groups. People in trouble, in poverty and in a state of everyday crisis will respond to a different kind of organized, united, protest action *that can win local struggles*, and at the same time help people assert their will to fight.

There is no organization better equipped to initiate, help form and build such new, working-class kinds of organizations.

We should take the same kind of initiatives to organize unity in struggle of the elderly and youth, farmers and agricultural workers. We should urge unions to initiate alliances between workers, farmers and agricultural workers.

We should take initiatives in every struggle, wherever we are, to organize forms of struggle against racism on everyday issues like racist police beatings and killings, church burnings, anti-immigrant attacks, affirmative action, etc.

I am convinced that people are ready to respond to such initiatives. In addition to such community initiatives, we should help the trade unions, locals and central labor bodies, to establish committees that will go out and organize struggles of the unemployed, hungry and homeless around immediate, often life-and-death issues, many of whom were once workers and members of unions.

All local, club initiatives could start as just loose committees that gradually become more organized forms of united people's struggles on every day basic needs and rights.

These local committees need not be in contradiction or try to substitute for the work of broad, national organizations in all these areas. They should complement them, add a local, militant, community-based struggle ingredient to each area. In fact, good relationships between the Party and national organizations should develop as one result of the Party's work.

Such organizing initiatives will make it easier for the Party clubs to become actively involved and a part of the daily lives and activities of their com-

munities – if possible, as an open, public, political Party of working and poor people united in struggle.

It is just such club involvement in organizing people into protest action on immediate demands that can lead to the very best kind of mass recruiting.

MASS RECRUITING ■ We are still mass recruiting on the streets. Whenever and wherever we set up Party tables, and when we invite people to join, they do.

But for whatever reason, we do less organized, consistent recruiting now. We do not set up tables as often.

And, recently there has been a basic change in how we are building the Party. I think most of our recruiting is now by means of the mail, including inquiries, letters and E-mail and as a result of people seeing our Web page on the Internet.

We have had great difficulty in convincing the clubs to consolidate new members. Where clubs have approached it seriously, they have had success. Not that everything worked. But some things did. New members participated in activities of one kind or another while others began to attend club meetings on a more or less regular basis.

To consolidate new members we have to go to them, not wait for them to come to us. For many new members, club meetings will not be the main way to activate them. Therefore, we have to think of other ways to bring them closer to the Party.

One way is to set up a *PWW* route in a neighborhood where new members live. Visiting new members weekly with the *PWW* and other materials is like a union where there is no checkoff.

We have also found that new members are more apt to come to activities, actions, demonstrations, and social functions. Each year our holiday Party keeps getting bigger and bigger. It has become a mass event for us.

An older comrade who could barely fit into the hall and barely hear herself talk complained that "It is too damn big, too noisy, too many people."

Maybe the most important feature of this event is that it is a place where new members come with their families and get to know and gain confidence in the Party.

Does it consolidate them? No necessarily. But it draws them and their families closer. They get good food, good politics and a good time. They leave with a wonderful image of the Party as a multi-racial,

multi-national working-class organization. They get a concrete feel for the Party and their comfort level goes up a notch or two.

Convincing people to sign a membership card is not the end of a process, but the beginning. It takes time, energy, initiative and creativity to win people to become Party activists.

Speaking of membership cards, the new cards you see here today are the result of a new, rather radical proposal in our approach to membership. I think it is absolutely necessary. Here's why.

The old way of is that when people ask to join we send an application for membership. Then we send the application to the district (which very often doesn't contact the person). Then we insist on meeting the person face to face before he or she is accepted. Even then it takes some time before a new member actually gets a membership card.

And all this implies that the process goes smoothly. That is, if the multiple letters back and forth don't discourage the person. If the time lapse between the inquiry and the response isn't so long that the person gives up. That is, if the district organizer isn't on vacation or isn't answering correspondence and so on.

Don't you think most people who ask to join have done a lot of thinking before writing, that most still have some hesitations and questions? Do you think our method dissipates or increases their anxiety? We make them make out forms, take a written then an oral, face-to-face test. It is as if we are still interviewing people for a secret-type organization.

I would bet that we have lost many potentially wonderful members because we don't trust people's sincerity, honesty and motives.

This is an ancient method that fits an illegal political organization, not a legal Party. It is not a mass Party style. We will never build a mass Communist Party of a new type with this old system.

I propose that when a person sends a letter saying they want to join the Communist Party, USA that we send them a *membership card*, not an application to become a member. All the other questions about contact, club, dues, etc., must be worked out after the person belongs to our Party.

We already have a few situations where a few people came together and formed a neighborhood club of the Communist Party and then wrote to advise us of their action and asked: "What next?"

We need a simple, "do-it-yourself" organization manual for clubs of a new type, a simple manual

that outlines, for example, what a Party organization in a neighborhood can do to get started.

The main point I want to make is that when a person asks to become a member we should immediately let them in, welcome them by issuing a membership card. Everything else comes later. I hope we will be able to make this change. It is necessary to become a mass Party.

FROM OLD TO NEW ■ Turning to Party work, let me give you some examples of districts where the old is being transformed into the new, with some great successes.

From Washington State: "Throughout the (election) campaign, a growing interest in radical solutions was evident, as was a lessening of fear of the left and acceptance of known Communists by labor and others. Many new members were recruited to the Party." Remember Washington was one of the states that held a groundbreaking, pioneering labor event honoring labor leaders, highlighting the ultra-right danger and the jobs issue. Twenty-one labor leaders and activists cosponsored and a number of candidates and elected officials attended the Washington event.

Illinois, Los Angeles and San Francisco also reported great, continuing results from their labor events.

And from Connecticut, where a recent successful labor event was held:

Without exception, the mass recruitment we have done has been out of organizing and building unity in action on working-class issues like police brutality, welfare cuts, the contract fight at Yale ... The best work at consolidation has been in clubs that are in the thick of the fightback, where the new members see a direct connection with their lives, but also something bigger. Recruitment, in and of itself, has given new life to some clubs. Strong, active clubs is the first step to consolidation because it is the presence of the Party in the workplace and neighborhood. Without that we can't consolidate new members. The club meeting is only one part of consolidation.

Our new members are primarily working class, many racially and nationally oppressed. Struggle is not new to their lives. What is new is the broader, working-class struggle framework, the unity concepts and the potential to win.

Michigan sent us what looks to be a great plan

of work for the coming period. Utah's report details some fine results in coalition work: "It was exhilarating that ... Communists, steel workers, welfare mothers and others could come together and accomplish something which could not be done individually - something new in these parts."

Southern California reports,

In response to Governor Wilson's disastrous welfare proposals, we called an emergency meeting of district leaders. We adopted a concrete plan of work to win the labor movement to lead the charge against welfare cutbacks for the passage of the Martinez Jobs Bill, and to mobilize the clubs to organize welfare recipients and the unemployed.

This great work has been replicated in a number of districts and clubs, but not nearly enough.

The new challenges call for us to rid ourselves of some old methods and styles that are no longer appropriate for the new situation.

STRUCTURE ■ In line with the mass Party concept, I want to propose a new and perhaps revolutionary change in structure and organization.

Should we consider "downsizing" our commissions, and all other committees, to a maximum of three? I believe that at least part of the reason some commissions don't meet, carry out assignments, etc., is because there are so many members that it is impossible to get agreement on a meeting date.

I think part of the reason so many assignments aren't carried out is because some comrades hide behind others. If there are no more than three on a committee or commission it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to shirk responsibility or accountability. We should consider such a change.

You will hear extended remarks on the Young Communist League from Comrade David Mirtz in this meeting, but I want to discuss some aspects of the Young Communist League and Party youth work that I think fit into the new times.

First, I have to say that with some exceptions, our work among youth is one of our main weaknesses.

There are a number of districts where we have good Party clubs, but no YCL.

We have some districts where there are young people, but they are in Party clubs and are not assigned to youth work. They do mass work. But

not youth mass work.

I think we have to say that from now on no Party club can be excused from helping to build the YCL.

Party clubs should organize social and political affairs that would especially attract young people. For example, wherever possible Party clubs should take part in any actions against child labor, which we will also hear about during this meeting.

Party clubs should take part in distribution of the *PWW* and especially the issues which will include special youth pages.

At shops where there are young workers, at college campuses and high schools, in struggles around jobs and housing the protest and demands should include some specific youth demands like recreational facilities, college tuition, etc.

The Party must help the YCL. But it must also carry on youth work in its own name. The Party must become known and respected as a fighter for the needs, demands and rights of young people.

But to help build the YCL and work among youth it is necessary to understand how young people think, how they respond to political and social struggles. Youth do not have the same respect or attachment to history and traditions. They develop their own approaches to struggles.

A YOUTHFUL STYLE ■ We have to create youth forms of organization, besides the YCL. Such forms must be looser, more flexible, less disciplined and demanding.

Youth forms have to be action-oriented and more militant.

Young people today are "wilder" than their parents were and need to participate in activities that will channel this wildness.

We should not see the YCL as a youthful replica of the Communist Party. The Party must be an organization of action, with a high level of discipline and sacrifice.

Youth need to protest, but they also need to have fun, to dance and sing, to Party.

We have to help the YCL build a different kind of movement. It is possible to do this while we are organizing the delegation to the youth festival in Cuba.

However, we cannot build a festival movement or build the YCL by tailing the Trotskyites who are organizing mainly the anything-but-youthful ultra left to go to Cuba.

The Trotskyites cannot organize a delegation that will return and build a U.S. youth in solidarity with Cuba movement. Only the YCL can build such a movement.

We should think about the Party and YCL initiating and organizing a labor-youth conference that would take up such issues as union organizing among young workers, the struggles against child labor, etc.

Such a conference could also take up the creation of youth forms for the trade unions, including the organization of recreational and sport teams in baseball, soccer, football, basketball, etc.

We have an advantage in that young people have greatly changed their attitudes toward labor and the trade union movement partly because the trade union movement has changed. And also partly because youth have become increasingly anti-corporate and anti-establishment because they see their lives and futures being systematically destroyed. Union Summer was a great experience for young students and workers.

The YCL has to be different, different than the Party. It has to adjust, and change to become looser, more flexible and more attuned to today's generation of youth.

PEOPLE'S WEEKLY WORLD ■ The *PWW* is fast becoming recognized as the best labor paper in the country. It is well laid out, in popular style. It is clear in its working-class line and its defense of Marxism-Leninism and socialism. It is broad in its outlook and coverage.

We have the best editorial, writing, technical and volunteer staff. It constantly amazes me that such a small, but totally dedicated, multi-talented Communist collective puts out the best U.S. newspaper every single week, never missing a deadline.

The *PWW* is in harmony with the class struggle orientation of the new AFL-CIO and is in weekly contact with active trade unionists across the country.

Just to give one example of how our newspaper and our working-class comrades are viewed by trade union leaders let me quote from a leading trade union comrade:

"The union president, with his whole entourage, walked over to us, and thanked us for being there. As he headed for the stage he took the *PWW*, held it up in front of him and said, 'It's good we've got some truth here!'"

Given the dramatic changes in the AFL-CIO, the decline of anti-Communism, the increasing prestige of the Party and the *PWW*, there is no reason why we couldn't have hundreds of thousands, or even millions of readers. Yet our circulation is in the thousands.

We need a well-thought-out drive to double our circulation in this coming period. We need a full review, district by district of how we use the *PWW*. We also need a far larger circulation to broaden the financial base of the *PWW*.

We have to remember that people who become readers of the *PWW* take a big step toward joining the Communist Party. Our newspaper is the best recruiter we have – in the shops, on the picketlines, on campuses and in communities.

We have not conducted a really big circulation drive in years. This is a moment when the *PWW* could become the best read, best-loved newspaper in our country.

Political Affairs continues to earn its reputation as the recognized, respected theoretical magazine of the Communist Party, USA. It is seen nationally and in the world movement as a standard bearer Marxism-Leninism and socialism.

To a great extent this is due to the dedication, hard work, theoretical excellence and high standards of its editor, Comrade Joe Sims.

However, like our newspaper, it also does not reach its circulation potential. Part of the problem is that we have not found an assistant editor. One comrade, no matter how dedicated and knowledgeable, cannot produce a magazine alone. We need your help in the ongoing search for an assistant editor.

CULTURE ■ As a rule we mention culture as a passing phrase. We give lip service to its importance as an ideological weapon on both sides of the class struggle. The dominant bourgeois culture impacts on our consciousness and thought patterns in so many different ways, especially in these times of the information age to mold our ideology and tie us to the ruling class.

Working-class culture in poetry, music, plays, fiction and non-fiction, gets mass exposure only if we do it.

We have cultural clubs, mass media and entertainment clubs. These clubs do a good job of criticizing bourgeois culture. But shouldn't Party clubs promote culture with working-class themes, and

anti-monopoly and anti-capitalist content? The cultural clubs should help districts plan and conduct cultural events that would attract not only Party, but new and non-members.

The *PWW* devotes as much as two cultural pages that in the main comment on bourgeois culture or reprint from other sources, like the Associated Press. But wouldn't it have much greater appeal and influence if it started to carry, for example, some really good working-class poetry and get our writers to do original pieces on different areas of working-class culture?

The new cultural magazine, *The Hammer*, is coming out regularly now. It is building a readership and has the potential of becoming a broad, Marxist-Leninist cultural magazine.

I feel compelled to mention an editorial in last Sunday's *New York Times*, titled "Hollywood's Long Memory," that criticizes Hollywood for continuing its ostracism of Elia Kazan and deny him awards he earned. The *Times* admits that 45 years ago he was a stool pigeon who gave games of his old comrades to the House Un-American Activities Committee. The *Times* says this is wrong, that "it is artistry, not politics, that the awards are supposed to honor." Although the *Times* also admits in the editorial that,

not only did he (Kazan) name names causing lasting damage to individual careers, but he lent his prestige and moral authority to what was essentially an immoral process ... an officially sponsored hysteria that exacted a huge toll on individual lives, on free speech and democracy.

Hollywood should be given an award for continuing to refuse to give an award to the stool pigeon Elia Kazan. From the recent letters published after the editorial, many others passionately agree with us.

MASS MEDIA, MASS COMMUNICATIONS ■ Our work with the mass media is still largely undeveloped and underutilized, but necessary to build a mass Party and recruit.

Most of you know the major work we have done, especially as a result of Comrade Terrie Albano's new assignment in this area.

You have been receiving the national press releases and have probably read the Party's letter to the editor in the *New York Times* in response to a

vicious, anti-Communist op-ed piece. For the second year the holiday speech and predictions was covered by C-SPAN and we are still getting calls as a result. We are working on getting a copy to make available to the districts. And, we are getting new members from our Web page on the Internet and through E-mail.

Every district and club can do media work. And there has been some good work by a few districts. But mainly we have not made the mass media an area of our regular work. This is a moment when we can make big breakthroughs.

Districts and clubs can get help by getting in touch with Comrade Terrie.

THE WORLD SCENE ■ This evening's session on international affairs has made this section much easier for me. The first-hand reports on Vietnam, Cuba, Russia, Australia and New Zealand will be much different from reports the comrades gave at public meetings. They will be on a high level and will include both negatives and positives.

The Australian Party requested that we send a leading comrade to go on a speaking tour (all expenses paid) to address mainly trade union, leadership and rank and file, and working-class audiences mainly on labor issues, including some Party to Party meetings. Rick Nagin also went to New Zealand. He will give a report on both tonight, but I want to share with you a letter we just received.

The invitation itself, but even more the reception and results of the trip, is an example of the high regard in which our Party is held in the world labor and Communist movement, because of our steadfastness and contributions to the defense and preservation of the principles of Marxism-Leninism and socialism.

Because this is so important for all of us to know, and because it is so uplifting, let me read just a few compliments from the thank you letter from Peter Symon, the general secretary of the CP of Australia:

I write to express our appreciation of the work done by Comrade Rick Nagin during his visit to Australia ... We were able to organize an extensive program for him in four main cities... You will be interested to know that we are continuing to receive membership applications to our Party as a result of his visit ... one of the latest from a full-time official of a union in Sydney... Please accept our thanks for sending us such an excellent representative of

your Party...

Now, I do have a few things I want to say on international questions.

First, we should take note of the fact that it took only one week for one of our new year's predictions to come true.

We said that because the United States has become isolated, the Clinton administration most likely will postpone the implementation of the main features of the Helms-Burton law against Cuba. And a week later, Clinton announced that he will not apply that law, at least for the time being.

We have been slow to respond to the resurgence of the peace movement sparked by the call of 60 generals and admirals for total nuclear disarmament. We must become a vital part of this renewal because so long as these weapons exist anywhere in the world, so long as they are not all destroyed, there exists the danger of nuclear annihilation. We played a critical and unique role in the peace movement. We still have many peace contacts and even connections to organizations and groups that can be reactivated. It is still one of our primary responsibilities to world peace.

SOCIALISM ■ There is a process I think we have to take special note of in the socialist world. There are two kinds of privatization now going on in the old socialist world.

China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea permit and encourage capitalist corporations to invest in their industries with new technology. But they do this under strict socialist government controls.

On the other hand, In the republics of the old Soviet Union, privatization takes place by private corporations taking over state-owned industries. At this point the process is not under state control.

Including in Russia, this has become the basis for massive robbery, exploitation, the ripping off of precious natural resources and extreme poverty, crime and corruption. Russia is drowning in all the worst features of capitalism.

Likewise, joining NATO ties Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic closer to the inner circles of capitalism and thus more under capitalist-imperialist domination.

One of the most puzzling questions about the

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The Fight for Industrial Concentration

Sam Webb

In his report to a National Board meeting, Gus Hall outlined the main challenges facing the Party in the period ahead. One of those challenges is the strengthening of our policy and practice of industrial concentration. Experience teaches us that the successful application of industrial concentration depends on a Party-wide approach. There is no other way to make a turn in our concentration work – and that is our objective.

We have a habit of reviewing our concentration work. The main reason for such reviews stem from the fact that the class struggle takes sharp turns, makes rapid shifts, and is ever changing. And with these turns, shifts and changes, we have no choice but to rethink and make adjustments in our concentration policy and practice.

Let me give two examples from our Party's history to illustrate this point. In 1932, the Party called a national conference for the purpose of turning the Party to the shops. Prompting the conference was the almost complete collapse of the U.S. economy and open shop conditions in nearly every industry. The conference, we can say in hindsight, brought about changes in our concentration policy and, in turn, left its imprint on the momentous class struggles that followed.

A half century later, in 1982, in the midst of markedly new conditions, namely a deep and protracted economic crisis and a growing upsurge in the lower and middle levels of the labor movement, we convened a Party-wide conference to take a new look at our industrial concentration activity. Like its predecessor 50 years earlier, this conference also adjusted our concentration policy to new conditions – it also left its mark on the struggles that ensued, including the historic change in the leadership of the AFL-CIO in the fall of 1995.

Today the class struggle is shifting. New features are emerging, all of which suggest that we are entering a new stage of the unremitting struggle between the two main contending classes in capitalist society and force us to take a new look at our

industrial concentration policy. Among the factors are the new level of monopolization and globalization of the economy, the accelerated application of new technology to the production process and the growth of the extreme right and fascist danger. Although it should be said that the fascist danger, because of the heroic efforts of the labor and people's movements in the 1996 elections, is not the same as it was a few months ago. It has subsided somewhat, notwithstanding the inescapable fact that fascism and extreme anti-democratic pressures are inherent in capitalism in its present stage.

But the single most important factor that prods us to make a fresh appraisal of our concentration work is the new developments in the labor movement. The new developments are historic, long-term – not momentary – and are changing all political relationships and political forces.

The new developments in labor are:

- forcing the Republican Party to assume a different posture in Congress. We hear no talk about the Contract on America, not a squeak about the Republican Revolution. Instead, Gingrich appeals for incrementalism and bipartisanship.

- tremendously enlarging the possibilities for independent political action. We can now realistically envision the main sections of the labor movement issuing a call for the formation of an independent labor-led people's party.

- opening up new opportunities for broad mass coalitions in the post-election period to tackle issues like jobs, higher wages, poverty, racism and discrimination, and so forth.

- creating a new framework for multi-racial, male-female, international working-class unity.

- repositioning the working class as an independent class force in the nation's political life.

- presenting new opportunities to the entire Party to assist the working class in its struggles on every front. Perhaps in the past it was difficult to plug into workers' struggles, but not now. Battles at the workplace and in the community are breaking out all over with labor and its allies in the thick of them.

It follows then that our industrial concentration

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policy has to be recalibrated to this new situation. It cannot stand on the old terrain of a decade ago. Before suggesting some changes that we might consider, I want to take a moment to briefly outline the aims of our concentration policy.

CONCENTRATION OBJECTIVES ■ Our concentration objectives are twofold. First, our industrial concentration policy aims to bring together a broad working-class and people's front to radically curb and eventually eliminate corporate power. To accomplish this task, we attach special strategic significance to the role of mass production workers. In our view, mass production workers are uniquely positioned to unify and raise the political sights of the working class and its allies.

But why? What accounts for this? Is it that we are forever wedded to the "glory days" of the 1930s, the decade during which mass production workers stormed the citadels of Corporate America? The answer to the latter question is "no," although I would be remiss if I didn't say that we draw inspiration and lessons from the struggles of the 1930s. Admittedly, much has changed since then in terms of the structure of the economy and the composition of the working class. Nevertheless production workers still confront monopoly power daily and directly, remain the main base of capitalist exploitation, are molded by a production process that is social and collective and embody rich traditions of struggle and militancy. Thus, while new militant sectors are emerging and playing a vital role in the labor movement, we still see mass production workers making a special contribution to the class struggle.

The other aim of our concentration policy, which follows from what I just said, is to bring thousands of mass production workers into our ranks. Their numbers, influence and spirit should be felt at every level of our Party's structure.

I mention each of these aims separately, but in life the two are and must be interrelated. In fact, the relationship between the two is one of mutual dependence. That is especially so at this moment.

As positive as the new developments in labor are – and it's hard to overstate this point – we would make a serious mistake if we entertained the idea that the working class can advance to higher stages of struggle without a bigger Party among mass production workers. John Sweeney, Rich Trumka, Linda Chavez-Thompson and the new voices of labor represent an enormous advance for the work-

ing-class movement. But this does not render our policy of industrial concentration obsolete.

Just the opposite. We need more, not less concentration. We need more, not less Communist plus. We need a much, much bigger Party among mass production workers. This is the best – maybe the only – guarantee that the class struggle trend becomes fully dominant and irreversible. It is this simple proposition, theoretically associated with the names of Marx and Lenin and challenged by some on the left, that must undergird our work.

Now I want to turn to a number of specific aspects of our concentration work that require collective thinking and input. To begin with what are the main sections of the working class in a strategic sense? For some states, for some districts, for the Midwest, the answer is obvious. But for other regions the answer is not quite so apparent. In Idaho or Maine, for instance, there are very, very few steel workers or auto workers.

Therefore, a more flexible concept is needed. I have been using the term mass production workers rather than basic industrial workers. This is a broader concept. Applied properly, it enables the whole Party to plug into concentration work in a day-to-day way. This conceptual adjustment, by the way, is not new. A few years ago we modified our concentration policy precisely along these lines, but we have not yet translated this more flexible concept into practical activity in most districts. We can't wait any longer in view of the new developments in labor. With a more flexible approach to concentration, every district and club can and should find ways to fit into our concentration work.

Another aspect of our industrial concentration policy requiring discussion is the distribution of our press. All of us I'm sure agree that the reestablishment of regular circulation of the *PWW* to workers is of overriding importance. In this connection, two questions arise. One is political; the other practical. While driving to Chicago for this meeting, the question was asked, "Is it a productive, good use of our time to distribute the *PWW* at shop gates week after week? What do we have to show for it?" That's a fair question and one that many comrades think about even if they do not express it.

Although we do not have the luxury of focus groups like the Clinton administration, we do have reliable measure of the influence of our press in the workplace. What is it? Our own shop workers – every one of them invariably says that the distribu-

tion of the paper in their shop changes the political atmosphere in a positive way affecting the attitude toward struggle among their co-workers. That's a high compliment for our paper as well as solid evidence that we should rapidly increase the circulation of the *PWW* at plant gates.

Which leads to the practical problem: we passed an auto plant while driving through Ohio that appeared inaccessible, not only to us, but to anyone hoping to pass out material at its entrance. While I wish this plant were the exception, I don't think that it is. More and more plants are simply not *PWW* distribution friendly. Given this fact, don't we have to look to other sites to distribute the paper and other materials? Some that come to mind are welfare and unemployment offices, residential neighborhoods, community center and union local halls, central labor council meetings and so forth. Here too a more flexible concept of industrial concentration would serve us well.

COMMUNIST PLUS ■ Still another aspect of our concentration work that urgently begs for more attention is our Communist plus among mass production workers. Generally speaking, there is plenty of room for improvement - both in terms of quantity and quality. Having said that, we can take pride in our election material, especially the pamphlet, *Vote As If Your Life Depends On It*. Sixty thousand copies reached voters with our unique Communist plus. The pamphlet's message corresponded with the overall analysis of the labor and people's movements in the 1996 elections. At the same time, it went deeper, bringing to the fore the fascist danger - among other things - that was missing in the analysis of our allies.

We need more Communist plus of this kind. At this moment our plus fits in with the overall thinking of broader forces on a wide range of issues. That is good, but not enough. Our plus has to unearth the class essence of questions. It has to relate the issues and struggles of the working class to the underlying class and economic dynamics of capitalism, to the drive for maximum corporate profits, to the struggle against racism and all forms of discrimination, and to the struggle for socialism in our country.

Reading speeches of Sweeney, Trumka and Chavez-Thompson are instructive and a welcome relief from those of their predecessors. Nevertheless, their speeches are not a substitute for what we have to say. They do not approach the class struggle in

precisely the same way that we do.

We see the interests of the two main classes - the working class and the capitalist class - as irreconcilable. We say that the present economic crisis and other social ills of capitalist society reside in a system of exploitation. We believe that the class struggle is a permanent and the defining feature of capitalism.

And, while we vigorously fight for immediate reforms, our fundamental conviction is that only the transformation of our society along socialist lines offers the working class and its allies a lasting way out of the present crisis.

Thus, our views are unique. But this need not put us at loggerheads with the labor movement. In fact, our assessments on most issues are welcomed by the labor movement. Wasn't that the case in the 1996 elections? There will be moments, however, when our views diverge with other progressive and left currents in labor. There is nothing wrong with this, provided we handle them in a mature and tactful way.

In the long run, we are convinced that the class struggle itself, with a healthy dose of our Communist plus, will win major sections of labor - leadership and membership - to the struggle for socialism.

Still another aspect of our industrial concentration work is the arena of collective bargaining. Despite the fact that labor is beginning to turn the corner in this crucial arena of struggle, major difficulties remain.

One of the striking features of this moment is the new degree of monopolization in every sector of the economy. In the the manufacturing sector, workers are confronting corporations that are trimming down their in-house functions and operations to what they call their core competencies. Meanwhile, other production operations are outsourced to an outer ring of low-wage sweatshop producers. What we have here is a pyramid, at the top of which sit large corporate giants who not only ruthlessly exploit workers, including children not yet in their teens, but also dominate the smaller, less capitalized shops in their rings. One writer described this process as concentration without centralization.

In the public sector, this process of monopolization plays itself out differently. The scenario is simple. What were public services are privatized and placed into the unscrupulous hands of mega-corporations with the assistance of public officials. Once done, these same corporate cutthroats immediately

adopt a lean and mean strategy, resulting in wage cuts, mass layoffs and declining services.

Needless to say, this monopolization of the nation's economic life presents new problems to the labor movement. New strategic concepts that correspond to the new level of corporate concentration are necessary. Here we have much to contribute.

The fight against racism and for Black, Brown, white unity is yet another aspect of our work. On the one hand, the downsizing, plant closings, budget cuts, persistent and pervasive discrimination and equally persistent and pervasive attacks on affirmative action continue. They bring in their wake a crisis of mammoth proportions to racially oppressed workers and their communities.

On the other hand, new opportunities are emerging to combat racism and strengthen multi-racial unity on a whole new level. For example, doesn't the election of Cynthia McKinney in Georgia, Loretta Sanchez in Orange County, Ca., and several other minority candidates in the South and elsewhere suggest that a significant section of white voters are moving in an anti-racist direction?

It is imperative to see both sides of this equation. To underestimate either results in inaction and missed opportunities in the fight against racism. It cedes the initiative unnecessarily to the class enemy who uses the "race" card very adeptly.

The struggle against present day racism and for multi-racial unity is a strategic cornerstone of our policy of concentration. It is also a strategic underpinning of a winning struggle against monopoly capital. What Gus said roughly 25 years ago – "racism is the most dangerous pollutant" – has as much force today, as it had then.

BUILDING THE PARTY ■ A final aspect of our industrial concentration policy is the building of our Party among mass production workers. It is, as I indicated earlier, at the core of our concentration policy and practice. Therefore, we have to ask what we have to do to speed up the recruiting of mass production workers into the Party? We have said on other occasions that recruiting workers is different than recruiting people off the streets. What we haven't said is what those differences are. I don't – and maybe collectively we don't – have all the answers to that question at this moment.

Nevertheless, I want to venture into some uncharted territory and suggest what some of the differences are between shop and street recruiting.

The class struggle is an everyday experience for shop workers. There is nothing abstract to them about corporate power. Mean spirited foremen, harassment on the job, racism and discrimination are daily realities. Their jobs are insecure. And, unlike people from other class strata, their reserves to fall back on are exceedingly meager.

Shop workers, therefore, tend to be a little bit more cautious. They may not be ready to join at the drop of the hat. In many cases, they will want to think it over, maybe discuss it with their families before becoming a member. Many will ask questions that we have to answer in a convincing way. For example: What is the present status of the Party? How much time is involved? What responsibilities will I have to assume? Can the Party make a difference in the life of my shop as well as my community? Since I am a member of a union, why do I need to join the Party? This becomes an even larger question given the new changes in the labor movement.

To answer these questions takes more than sound bites. We have to provide convincing answers in a give-and-take atmosphere. There is no one way to do this. Smaller informal meetings are probably necessary. Worker's schools can be helpful. Our written materials have to address these questions. Video tapes like *History's Challenge* should be used more than they have been. Social functions have a role to play.

We also should explore the possibility of removing the anti-Communist clause in union bylaws. This too is a barrier although I don't think that it is by any means the main barrier.

On still another level, the fight for greater Party presence would be helpful to mass recruiting among workers. Seeing the Party in the mass media, in their community, in the political arena, etc. creates a more conducive atmosphere for recruiting shop workers. Finally, while recruiting in the shop is different than recruiting people off the streets, there are some lessons that we can draw from our experience tabling and street recruiting. The two main ones are: first that people join only if asked and second, that for many people joining is not a gut-wrenching decision.

As I said, I don't have all the answers with respect to mass recruiting of shop workers. My job is only to open up such a discussion. If we can collectively explore this question and come up with some answers, then this will have been a productive meeting. □

Labor and the Left – What's Next for Political Action

George Meyers

A revitalized AFL-CIO, headed by a vigorous new leadership was the decisive factor in the resounding setback handed right-wing Republicans in the November presidential and Congressional elections. Labor and the women's vote – which labor helped mobilize – along with votes of the African American, Chicano, Latino and other racial minorities, gave Bill Clinton his plurality.

Enraged Republicans were the first to credit labor's role. An angry Newt Gingrich fumed that "without the AFL-CIO we would have increased our membership in the House by 30 votes. Instead, we lost eight." Nineteen of the most reactionary members of the House, targeted by labor, went down to defeat. Another dozen, who won handily in 1994, barely squeaked through in 1996. Only a hasty last minute repudiation of their past support of the Gingrich agenda and massive TV ad blitz saved them.

For the first time in its 41 years of existence, the entire AFL-CIO was mobilized to its very grass-roots. Every affiliate was deeply involved in an all-out drive to register union members, families and friends, educate them on issues and get out their vote. This in itself was an outstanding accomplishment.

How was it done? By making economic issues of deep concern to working people central: saving Medicare and Medicaid, jobs, the brutal impact of racism and the decades-long decline in living standards. Prayer in the schools, abortion, gun control and similar issues put forward by the far-right to disorient and divide voters ended on the back burner.

The enormous sums of money spent by both parties in an effort to buy the elections remains a scandal. Corporate America screams about the AFL-CIO spending \$35 million "of its members' hard earned money," but it outspent labor seven to one. This doesn't include tens of millions put in the pot by CEOs and their spouses. Rupert Murdoch, the international publisher, contributed \$1

million to the Republican Party of California alone.

Now a whole host of press editorials are lecturing about the need for electoral reform. In the past such talk came to nothing, but you can be certain that the incoming Republican Congress, with the help of some Democrats, will do their best to further curtail labor's already severely restricted electoral rights.

The AFL-CIO made it clear from the beginning that the 1996 elections were part of an ongoing campaign that would include targeting right-wing members of Congress for defeat in 1998. Permanent committees – a minimum 100 trade unionists each – are being set up in each Congressional district, to work year round encouraging members of Congress to be more responsive to the needs of working people. The AFL-CIO has also announced its intention of running as many trade union candidates as possible at every level in coming federal, state, county and municipal elections. The United Mine Workers has been doing this for some time and with considerable success.

When John Sweeney addressed the Democratic Convention last August, he projected a number of demands under the slogan "America Needs a Raise." Included was an attack on the so-called "Welfare Reform Law," enacted by Congress and signed by Clinton over the strenuous objections of labor and a whole host of progressive individuals and groups. This cruel law denies help to immigrant workers with or without papers. It guarantees an additional million children will slide into abject poverty. The law is already being used to replace union jobs with workers on welfare "wages."

Sweeney also raised a number of other demands including outlawing the use of scabs as permanent replacements in strikes.

The AFL-CIO is already making it clear that it does not intend to sit back and wait for Clinton. That was the big blunder it made in 1992. Even before his second term begins, the president is emphasizing cooperation with Republicans to balance the budget. He also agrees with them that a "smaller government" is the way to bring it about.

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Clinton's nomination of Madeline Albright as new Secretary of State has very negative implications regarding Clinton's foreign policy. As U.S. representative at the U.N., Albright proved herself to be an interventionist war hawk. One of her staunchest supporters is the anti-labor and racist reactionary, Senator Jesse Helms.

Clinton's proposal to name William Daley as Commerce Secretary has serious negative implications. Daley was used by Clinton to bludgeon and/or bribe Senate Democrats to vote with Republicans for ratification of NAFTA – even in the face of strenuous labor objections.

Despite Corporate America's bitter opposition, there is every indication that labor intends to mount the kind of militant campaign that won passage of the Wagner Act and other New Deal reforms in the 1930s and forced a Gingrich-led House to increase the minimum wage in the recent session of Congress. The post-election, mid-week rally of over 20,000 Pennsylvania unionists in Harrisburg to protest anti-labor legislation is another strong indication of the direction labor is taking.

The question arises, "Where will the newly organized Labor Party fit into the picture?" Will it help or hinder the AFL-CIO's political activity? We have the right to assume that leaders like Robert Wages, head of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic, will not permit it to drift into isolation. Communists and other left activists can already begin working to urge local unions and individual trade unionists who have not yet affiliated to do so.

ROLE OF THE LEFT IN LABOR ■ In this period of historic upsurge, a key role of the left in labor is to help mobilize mass support for organized labor's political demands at the grassroots and in the working-class communities, and in the process to help advance new demands. Four years ago, labor gave little support to the call for a federal jobs program. Now it belongs right up front. A pre-election AFL-CIO survey of its members proved jobs and job security to be their highest priority. Health care and education followed next in line. The budget deficit, a major concern of Clinton and the Republicans, trailed last at 19 percent.

Under Clinton, employment has remained stagnant. In fact, during his first term, several million better paying jobs have evaporated because of downsizing and mergers or been exported overseas. New jobs have been overwhelmingly in the low-

paying service industries. Passage of the so-called "Welfare Reform Bill," requiring people on relief to find non-existent employment, has dramatized the need for a massive jobs bill.

Unlike the crisis of the 1930s, we don't have to begin searching for a bill. We already have one, the Martinez Jobs Bill which enjoys substantial Congressional, labor and community support. In addition, there is the Dellums Bill. Each bill complements the other.

Outlawing corporate use of scabs to replace strikers would be a good beginning. As long as Taft-Hartley, with its Section 14 B "right to work" (for less) a Cold War remnant remains in force, labor's inherent right to organize and strike when necessary will be seriously hampered. The same goes for Landrum-Griffin and a whole host of anti-labor laws at state and local levels.

An all-out campaign by labor and its allies to replace these monstrosities with the Wagner Act, which guaranteed workers the right to organize into unions of their choice without interference by the boss or his hirelings, is on the order of the day. We need an act to legalize a union when a majority of workers sign a petition calling for union recognition.

MAKE GOVERNMENT SERVE THE PEOPLE ■ It is time to put an end to the phoney call for a "smaller government" both by Clinton and the Republicans. Did either party object when a trillion dollars of our tax money was used to bail out the Savings and Loan rip-off? Or to the \$300 billion plus being sent to Boeing and Lockheed, just as starters for a phony new Star Wars? Of course not! As for those demanding smaller governments at state and local levels, they are among the loudest advocates for the use of tax money to build ball parks, football stadiums, fancy restaurants and swank hotels for private owners. To its advocates, smaller government means a drastic reduction or elimination of funds for social needs public education, housing, medical care, aid to the destitute, trash collection – anything that benefits working people – and turn them over to corporations for their private profit.

The invariable response to requests for funds for social needs is, "But there is no money." One might facetiously reply, "True, the rich have it all." The answer is to raise taxes on the rich and cut the bloated military budget.

Since the explosion of the internationalism of

production and trade, it has been a clear-cut policy of U.S. imperialism to encourage the export of capital as an important means of consolidating its influence around the world. The export of capital has meant the export of tens of millions of better paying jobs and enormous super profits for the multinational corporations.

On the other side of the coin, the government has created "Barriers that deprive the U.S. of the benefits" of exporting manufactured goods.¹ In addition to enormous profits for the U.S. multinationals, this policy has created a huge import deficit for our country which adds to our bloated national debt.

The AFL-CIO can be key in building a movement to reverse this criminal policy. A good beginning would be to end the billions of dollars in tax breaks enjoyed by the U.S. multinationals on their holdings abroad.

From the victory over Bridgestone-Firestone, it is clear there is now an understanding in the AFL-CIO that is key to dealing with the grave problems created by the globalization of finance and production and that international trade union solidarity and cooperation is vital. This is a welcome change from past policies which benefited the U.S. multinationals in the name of "fighting Communism."

LABOR AND THE CPUSA ■ The Communist Party has as its goal the revolutionary transition to a socialist society that would replace a corrupt and decaying capitalist system. Capitalism is a system which has proven incapable of and unwilling to end such mass evils as unemployment, racism and abject poverty. It is a system in which "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer."

The U.S. working class will decide what form socialism will take in our country. For absolute certainty, no individual or class will live in luxury off the labor of another. We consider it our democratic right to work for a socialist society. To further this goal, we seek to attract new members to our Party and to increase the readers of our press, particularly among workers, union and non-union alike. At the same time, we join with organized labor and other people's movements in the struggle for reforms designed to ease the heavy burden capitalism has forced on the backs of the working class.

We consider that a labor-led mass political party is long overdue. The United States is the only developed capitalist country in the entire world in which working people do not have a mass political party of their own. We badly need such a party with a program that would win to its ranks the tens of millions of stay-at-home voters who are thoroughly disgusted with the Democratic-Republican two-party system of Big Business.

The recent enlarged meeting of our National Board enthusiastically voted in favor of the proposal of the chair of our Political Action Committee, Comrade Jarvis Tyner, to run at least one comrade in every district for public office in the next elections. We are confident that the questions we raise will benefit labor candidates and all progressive candidates in general.

ORGANIZE THE UNORGANIZED ■ The success of the organizing drive being shaped by the national AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions is key to the success of its political action program. As William Z. Foster, leader of the Great Steel Strike of 1919 and past chair of the CPUSA emphasized years ago,

The organization of the unorganized is a life and death question for the labor movement. To bring millions into the unions is necessary for the protection of the unorganized workers and to further working-class ends in general. Doubling or tripling the total number of organized workers will, merely by the increased weight of organized labor alone, enormously enhance its power and stimulate all its institutions.

Decisive to success are the grass roots left-center-coalitions that are a mark of the newly invigorated AFL-CIO. They are as important as they were in the CIO of earlier times. They are also a prime target of the ruling class. The left has a special responsibility in defending them and working to extend them.

To conclude, there is every opportunity for all members of the Communist Party and the left to give full support to the newborn AFL-CIO's political action campaign, as well as its drive to organize the unorganized. □

Reference Notes

1. *Business Week* 12-20-96.

A Victory Story

Joelle Fishman

The 1996 election results in Connecticut's 5th Congressional District are a turning point for labor and the people's movement. In a race many believed could not be won, Gary Franks, a Republican ultra-right Gingrich supporter, was defeated handily by Jim Maloney, a Democrat who allied himself with organized labor. Like similar results in key districts across the country, this campaign was crucial in limiting the powers of the ultra-right and preventing a vicious anti-people takeover of government.

A massive education, action and get-out-the-vote campaign by the AFL-CIO's Labor '96, coupled with a major voter registration drive and initiatives by environmental, student and senior organizations, turned the tide. The results have inspired and raised the sights of unions and their members, opening new doors to organizing the unorganized and to the possibility of electing union activists to public office. The significance is magnified by the nature of the district and Franks' candidacy.

Connecticut's 5th Congressional District sprawls west from mid-state and includes 31 towns. It is made up of suburban, rural and former industrial areas. The hub is Waterbury (population 108,000) the 20th poorest city in the nation, which once was the center of the brass industry in the United States. Historically, Waterbury and the Brass Valley were in the center of class struggle, from two general strikes in 1919 and 1920, to the rise of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union in the '40s. However, during the post-World War II period – when militant and Communist-led unions were busted up by government repression and right-wing union leaders – a period of decline in the class struggle and union membership set in.

Today there are no brass mills left in Waterbury or the Brass Valley. Their closure left behind pollution of the waterways and soil, poverty and unemployment. The largest private employer in Waterbury is now a hospital. On the site of the Chase Brass Mill, a gigantic shopping mall is under construction. It is the focus of protest because the developer is

using non-union, low-wage labor.

In 1984 John Rowland, now Republican governor of Connecticut, won election to Congress from the 5th District, a seat formerly held by a Democrat. He was the youngest member of Congress and a darling of the ultra-right. When he abandoned his seat to run for governor in 1990, Gary Franks was elected. Franks became the first African American Republican in Congress for decades. The right wing loved him and brought him into national prominence because of his attacks on the Congressional Black Caucus, his virulent opposition to affirmative action and his 100 percent voting record for big business.

Despite his record as a slumlord, Gary Franks carried Waterbury in the 1990 election because voters knew him as someone born and raised in town, a deacon in his church and known by a large number of people. Overall the number of African American voters in the 5th District is about 8 percent. Franks depended on votes from the wealthy, conservative suburban towns in the district to win. During his three terms, Franks paid less and less attention to his home base and more to his own aspirations on the national scene, including becoming a U.S. Senator.

Franks' arrogance toward his own constituency became crystal clear in 1995, when Rev. Jesse Jackson came to Connecticut at the request of a broad coalition of clergy, labor and community organizations and individuals. A march and church rally were organized to oppose the attempts of Sen. Joseph Lieberman and Congressman Gary Franks to abolish affirmative action programs. As Jesse Jackson and dozens of local activists crowded into Franks' Waterbury office singing "We Shall Overcome," the Congressman refused to open the door to his private room or even acknowledge their presence. During that year, various coalitions were formed to protest Franks' positions. Demonstrators marched on his home and office, setting the stage for the Labor '96 campaign.

When the new national leadership of the AFL-CIO took the extraordinary step of holding a special convention and allocating \$35 million for the education and mobilization of union members against the

Joelle Fishman is chairperson of the Connecticut District of the CPUSA and is a secretary of its National Committee.

Republican right, Connecticut's 5th District was a natural target. While the possibility of defeating Franks was not a sure bet, the fact that over 40 percent of the district's union members had voted in the last election against their own interests for the Republican and the fact that winning over half of them could make the difference in defeating Franks, was a compelling argument. Also key was the enthusiasm of the current leadership of the Waterbury Central Labor Council and their commitment to building a revitalized labor movement.

LABOR LEADS THE WAY ■ The assignment of AFL-CIO staff into the 5th District campaign, with research, flyers, television and radio ads – all prepared nationally – made it possible to inspire local union activists that it was possible to win. The Labor '96 slogan, "Building to Win, Building to Last," also set the tone that whatever the outcome of this election, the goal is a bigger, stronger union movement – a movement that in the long run, can win on working-class issues. The campaign was organized with the Waterbury Central Labor Council at its center.

The Labor '96 campaign threatened and infuriated the ultra-right, who moved swiftly to attempt to curtail the rights of unions to spend money in the election campaign. The \$35 million was used to educate union members and the public about issues. It did not specifically tell people who to vote for. This was completely legal and Republican efforts to limit its dissemination largely failed nationwide. Extremely effective and creative actions which focused on the issues of raising the minimum wage, and saving Medicare and Medicaid, school lunches, student loans and pensions won the hearts and minds of working families throughout the district.

In late spring, Gary Franks published an autobiography, *Searching for the Promised Land*. The last chapter was written by voters in the 5th District – a 50-page "chapter" included Franks' voting record and personal comments by community leaders representing labor and the environment. Labor '96 activists turned up with *The Lost Chapter* at several book signings, and used it to begin the education process among labor leaders.

When Congress was about to vote on the minimum wage, Labor '96 launched a national television ad campaign coupled with simultaneously held local demonstrations calling for an increase in the minimum wage, and exposing the huge gap

between the wealthy and the poor.

In Waterbury, the demonstration was held in front of the Post Office building where Franks' office is located. A grocery cart was filled with \$36 worth of groceries, representing the amount of additional food a family would have on the table each week if the minimum wage was raised ninety cents an hour. The demonstration was followed by a march to a local church where the Connecticut Jobs Coalition was conducting a public hearing on the need for living-wage job creation. The news media carried the story.

After voting against raising the minimum wage or to block its consideration in nine different votes and after arguing that he would never support an increase in the minimum wage, Gary Franks was forced to vote yes. A Congress that had vowed in its majority to stop an increase in the minimum wage was forced to change its position.

This clear victory for labor and working families gave new strength and encouragement to the Labor '96 campaign. In the following weeks the momentum was maintained with constant demonstrations and actions wherever Gary Franks appeared. Each time more and more people became involved, going back to their workplaces and spreading the word.

Gary Franks' arrogance again became crystal clear for everyone to see when he announced his candidacy. The location he chose, the Four Points Sheraton Hotel, was under union boycott because the management had not yet negotiated a contract 12 months after an NLRB union recognition election was won. Hundreds of union activists and community supporters gathered outside the hotel with signs and messages supporting the hotel workers and opposing Franks. When a newspaper reporter asked Franks why he had chosen this site, he replied, "This is my lucky place. My luck is more important to me than whatever the concerns of those people may be." Frank's statement, published next morning, further angered those who were determined that he should not return to Congress.

Two months later, Franks returned to the Four Points Sheraton Hotel. This time he brought Newt Gingrich for a major fund-raising dinner. While most Republican Congressmen were doing all they could to distance themselves from Gingrich, Gary Franks boldly brought Gingrich into Waterbury.

On ten days notice 600 protesters gathered outside, perhaps the largest demonstration in Waterbury in decades. The coalition of labor, environmental activists, youth, seniors, Black, Brown and white was

extremely impressive. When Gary Franks said the demonstrators were being paid off and had no brains, Connecticut AFL-CIO president John Olsen replied, "As usual, Gary Franks has it backwards. We have no money, but we have a lot of intelligence." Dozens of new volunteers signed up for the Labor '96 campaign. Photos of young people carrying coffins labeled "Medicare," "Living Wage Jobs," "Pensions," and "Environment" told the story in the media.

The outstanding feature of the Labor '96 campaign was the countless shoptalk leaflettings, steward meetings, union phone banks and hundreds of union volunteers on election day. These efforts have left behind strengthened union locals, a revitalized Waterbury Central Labor Council and enlarged coalitions of labor and community to keep organizing for jobs and security. In addition, the support and participation of unionists from neighboring districts who worked the phone banks, mobilized for demonstrations and pulled out the vote on election day has given birth to a new level of solidarity within the Connecticut labor movement.

When election day came, Democrat Jim Maloney was surrounded by union members. He won 20,000 more votes than in his first try two years earlier. Those 20,000 votes elected him to Congress. Publicly, in front of the television cameras, he expressed his appreciation for the work of the labor movement. The get-out-the vote efforts of labor were key to the victory. In town after town, it was not the Democratic Party machinery but the labor unions who were staffing the phone banks and pulling people out to vote. Franks did not carry Waterbury or other working-class towns. He only carried the wealthiest towns.

Maloney won because more people turned out to vote from the areas that traditionally vote Democrat and because labor turned around Republican and Democratic union members who had previously gone with Franks. The most impoverished areas in the cities of the 5th District still have a low turnout. These areas need targeting by labor to register voters and to field working-class candidates who speak directly to the issues of the neighborhoods and offer a strong reason to vote on election day.

A very significant cooperation emerged from the elections between the environmental movement and organized labor. Environmental issues are big in the 5th Congressional District and the Sierra Club nationally and local grassroots environmental organizations had targeted Gary Franks for defeat. The Labor '96 campaign set the framework that made it

possible for coalitions to form on the issues. In every major action and demonstration, environmental themes were included and environmental leaders participated. In mapping out their plans for door-to-door election work, the Sierra Club met with labor leaders to coordinate their activities.

Their impact showed up in the vote. In Naugatuck, Maloney – who embraced labor and environmental issues – beat Franks by 1,100 votes. But the local Clinton Democrat, running for state representative, consistently refused to take pro-labor or environmental stands and lost by 700 votes.

ROLE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY □ The Connecticut Communist Party threw its full efforts into the campaign to defeat Gary Franks. Communist union members helped mobilize their co-workers to build the Labor '96 effort and Communist environmentalists helped mobilize their organizations and encourage coalition building with Labor '96. Members from other cities worked with Labor '96 on phone banking and helped the Waterbury Communist Party Club go door-to-door in one large housing development to register voters, sign up new members to the Communist Party and pull out the vote on election day.

We recognized that a larger Communist Party in Waterbury, a larger number of activists who are committed to working-class unity and struggles, can make a decisive contribution to the future. We utilized the *People's Weekly World* and other national flyers as well as developing some of our own – including one early campaign flyer that detailed Franks' voting record. The contributions made by individual Communists were only possible because of the strategy and tactics of the entire organization.

The inspiration for work in Connecticut came from the assessment of the Party's National Committee that there was a fascist-like danger from ultra-right Republicans that must be stopped.

Some of our friends in the environmental and peace movements argued that this position, which placed us in coalition with Democrats, was a step away from independent politics. In fact the opposite was true. By placing our full force behind the goal of changing Congress and defeating Gary Franks, we helped strengthen labor's voice and organizing power. As a result, the potential for candidates – or even a political party independent of big business ties and led by labor and its allies – is stronger now than a year ago.

Communists also helped defeat Republican control of the State Senate, through their work in a key targeted district outside Hartford and in a legislative district within Hartford. In addition, a full-fledged mobilization in a working-class section of New Haven contributed to the anti-Republican vote and resulted in a new *PWW* route and new members.

In Waterbury, we learned by going door-to-door in one large housing development that there is a great appreciation for the *PWW* and a great openness to our ideas and program. Most of the new members are struggling to make it economically. Some are members of unions many have little or no organizational experience and some voted for the first time.

The first step in bringing new members and friends made during the election work closer to the Communist Party was taken in December. The annual statewide celebration of the Communist Party USA's anniversary was held in Waterbury for the first time ever, a triumph given the history of the city. Billed as a "Tribute to Labor's Leadership in the 1996 Elections," presentations of the book, *Working Class USA* (autographed by Gus Hall) were made to several Central Labor Council presidents. "I didn't come here to receive an award," said one of the presidents. "I came here to say thank you for all that you did to make the victory possible. Labor elected Jim Maloney to Congress and now labor will make

sure Maloney is there on the issues."

The election victory in Connecticut's 5th District, as around the country, opens new possibilities for winning defensive battles as well as for moving onto the offensive. The challenge is to translate the energy from the elections into mass action for living-wage job creation and passage of the Martinez Bill, organizing the unorganized, addressing issues at the state legislature and preparing for municipal elections in November 1997. Voters are more open to the need for a labor-led people's party, a goal Communists have worked for many years.

The experiences of Labor '96 across the country have placed the AFL-CIO in position to aid local councils in their efforts to organize the unorganized, fight for working-class issues and build coalitions with working-class communities. This new leadership changes the landscape.

At the same time, anger and despair over the implementation of welfare cutoffs with nothing else in place, and massive layoffs to boost corporate profits, have left many people searching for direction. The Communist Party can move people into action in the workplaces and neighborhoods where we concentrated our election work. We can do this by providing the class confidence that it is possible to win with unity and by offering a labor and peoples' legislative agenda as a basis for struggle. □

Hall continued from page 17

crisis in the socialist world is what happened to the Communist Parties in these countries. I remember that they were always big talkers. But obviously, politically and ideologically, they were really a lot of "mush." They were led down the capitalist road of betrayal and corruption by a bunch of Gorbachevs.

I am now reluctantly convinced that before these countries can return to building socialism they will have to go through the horrors of the capitalist experience. In my opinion, to turn this process around and return to socialism will take some form of revolutionary change. It may not be possible to do away with corrupt capitalist regimes that are now in power without some form of mass actions, even revolutionary action.

My remarks do not cover every phase of our Party's activities, every important issue or question. I tried to propose some new concepts, especially around capitalism in crisis and the Party, to highlight

the questions we have to address at this meeting.

However, in addition to the written remarks many of you sent in for the preparation of this report, and we have heard from almost every district, each of you have the responsibility in this meeting of filling in whatever you think is missing. You have the responsibility to deepen and expand. Each of you can and should give your own interpretation of events, based on your own experiences and thinking. That is what I consider real collective work.

At the conclusion of this meeting we should be convinced that we can all go home and convince the whole Party, and especially our clubs, that this is a moment when we can play a very special role in the lives and struggles of our class and people - that there is nothing that our country needs more now than a mass Communist Party. We should be convinced that this National Committee can give the working-class kind of leadership that will inspire and guide our Party to do great and wonderful things. It is possible because we have a great and wonderful Party. □

The '96 Elections in Washington State

Virginia Brodine, B.J. Mangoang

In 1994, six of the Gingrich Gang elected to Congress, including some of the most ultra-right, came from Washington state. An open seat formerly held by a Democrat was taken. Incumbent Democrats, including long-time Speaker of the House Tom Foley, were defeated. With Republican Jennifer Dunn's reelection, the Contract on America was given seven supporters in a Congressional delegation of nine, making the state an important battleground for '96.

While the prospects for defeating Dole appeared good in this state, the election made it clear that Clinton's coattails had little pulling power. The Republican candidate for governor, Ellen Craswell, had a Christian Coalition base and ultra-right policies, making her defeat imperative.

The campaign was different from anything this state has seen since the Washington Commonwealth Federation was the left wing of the Democrat Party in the '30s and early '40s. Labor's independent campaign made the difference. The Communist Party was in the thick of the struggle.

To summarize results: One member of the Gingrich gang, Randy Tate, was defeated. Two others, Linda Smith and Jack Metcalf, were declared losers on election night, but got back into Congress by the skin of their teeth after absentee ballots were counted. The margin in both cases was less than one percent of the vote. Congressman Jim McDermott, who led the fight for a single-payer health bill and co-sponsored the Martinez Jobs Bill, was easily reelected, as was veteran Norm Dicks.

Dole lost here and Craswell was defeated by Gary Locke, a moderate Democrat who is the first Asian American governor in the continental U.S. He faces a legislature where the Republicans took the Democrats' slim lead in the Senate and maintained their majority in the House, although it was narrowed.

Repudiation of the Christian Coalition was indicated by the fact that many counties which sent

Republicans to Congress were unwilling to put Craswell in the governor's mansion. Nevertheless she carried 14 counties.

The state Labor Council made a concerted effort to recruit candidates from the labor movement - 25 ran for the legislature and other state offices. Eight successfully campaigned for election or reelection, winning seven House seats and one in the Senate. Five of the eight are women. In Spokane, Lisa Brown, a member of the Washington Federation of Teachers, who had previously served in the House, inflicted the only defeat on a Republican state senator in this campaign.

In general, candidates and initiatives which offered voters a clear choice did best. This was quite striking in the campaign for state Superintendent of Schools and two initiatives relating to education. Terry Bergeson, former WEA leader and strong advocate for public education, defeated right-wing businessman Ron Tabor. He was associated with initiatives advocating charter schools and school vouchers, both defeated two to one.

On the other hand, in a campaign between a Democrat who took a "centrist" position and a Republican who distanced himself from Gingrich, there appeared to be little choice and the Republican incumbent won easily. This was true, for example, in a mainly suburban Seattle district where differences between Republican Rick White and his opponent were somewhat blurred.

WHAT HAPPENED? ■ Why was the spirited campaign against the Contract Republicans not more effective? What were the weaknesses that kept the turnout low, allowed Metcalf and Smith to squeak to victory, and contributed to five of their gang retaining their seats?

One Communist volunteer for her union's phone campaign to register voters reported that fully half were not registered and many could not be convinced of the value of voting. One reason is that unemployment has dropped in the state. Relatively good economic conditions, unequal and shaky though they are, tend to blind people to the threat from the right. A second reason is that fight-

Virginia Brodine and B.J. Mangoang are contributors to *Political Affairs*.

ing for the "lesser evil," though necessary, did not offer some voters a sufficiently positive goal to break down convictions that "politicians are all alike" and "there's no use voting." This indicates the importance of more labor candidates and other independent progressive candidates, including Communists, who can give people something to vote for.

Although it was low, voter turnout here was five percent higher than the national average, not unusual for the state. It would be worth comparing the figures from recent elections in Washington and other states with good initiative laws, to those without to see whether that is a factor. Strong interest in passing or defeating initiatives builds interest in voting.

One initiative on the '96 ballot granting the right to run gambling casinos on Indian reservations was partly responsible for increased registration and voting by Native American Indians. The initiative failed however.

CAMPAIGN WEAKNESSES ■ Hindsight reveals some weaknesses in the campaign against the ultra right. In Southwest Washington, Linda Smith, who in '94 defeated her Democratic opponent after winning a primary write-in campaign, was considered unbeatable. It was not until Brian Baird's shoestrings campaign racked up a surprisingly big vote in the primary that the Democratic Party gave him the support he deserved. There had always been enthusiasm for Baird at the grassroots. It was expressed at the AFL-CIO state convention with a resolution urging that Smith be targeted and Baird supported by labor.

Some observers have commented that if this state, like Oregon and California, had had an initiative campaign for an increase in the state minimum wage, the increase in the pro-labor vote would almost certainly have been enough to tip the scales in the Smith and Metcalf races.

Some unions were slow to move and tailed the Democratic Party. While some environmental organizations participated actively in the campaign (the Sierra Club especially helping to defeat Tate), the importance of this issue was underestimated. One factor contributing to Metcalf's slim victory was that both distanced themselves from Gingrich on environmental issues. (Metcalf also boasted a couple of pro-labor votes).

The lessons of these mistakes and weaknesses

are important for the future, but by far the most lasting effect on Washington politics was the basis laid for continued independent political action. Labor's independent role ranged from the national AFL-CIO's TV ads, with this state targeted heavily, through a close working relationship between local labor councils and Jobs with Justice, to a newly energized rank and file. Joint action with community organizations also bodes well for the future, including Citizen Action and a wide range of women's, environmental, religious, welfare rights and gay and lesbian groups.

Valuable experience was gained in the nuts and bolts of making the process work. In the first efforts to register voters, time was wasted knocking on doors of people who were not home or not interested. Later, phone calls were made first, with volunteers in the field calling to get names and addresses of people who had responded favorably. Registering people as "permanent absentees," which makes voting easier, proved popular.

COMMUNIST ROLE ■ The Communist Party's participation began in May, when delegates to the second session of the state convention picketed a fast food chain outlet, targeting Dole and Gingrich on the minimum wage issue.

The convention adopted a five-month action agenda, making the Party's "number one priority to dump the Gingrich Gang and defeat the Contract on America." Contrasting a people's agenda with that of the Gingrich Gang and its corporate sponsors, we planned to "organize and mobilize around issues that will define the election, turn working people out to vote, and build working-class muscle for the struggles ahead."

Focus on this agenda was maintained throughout the five months, with the Seattle and Tacoma clubs concentrating on defeating Tate, and the Central Washington Club on defeating Doc Hastings. Individual Communists participated in Labor '96 through their unions and other organizations. Clubs tabled in Seattle, Tacoma and Yakima, registering voters, distributing literature and recruiting people to the Party. The PWW, Gus Hall's *The 1996 Elections: What's at Stake* and the Party's labor program were distributed at the national Jobs with Justice Conference in Seattle. These materials, plus the "Vote Because Your Life Depends On It" flyer were used widely in succeeding months. The Spanish language side of the "Vote" flyer was especially impor-

tant in Central Washington.

The Party raised the danger of the ultra-right as no one else did, and was effective in making the jobs issue central. A leaflet which targeted Gingrich and Dole on the minimum wage and pushed the Martinez Jobs Bill was later adapted to tie Tate with Gingrich on these issues, done in both English and Spanish.

Organizing for the successful PWW Labor Brunch in September was an important aspect of the campaign, helping to build broad unity. "Celebrate the New Day in Labor" was the theme, with both the ultra-right danger and the jobs issue highlighted. Twenty-one labor leaders and activists co-sponsored and a number of candidates and elected officials attended.

REDBAITING ■ The Party helped turn back two attacks on Labor '96. In a state Republican newsletter, Todd Myers, communications director, accused the AFL-CIO and John Sweeney of following the Communist Party agenda. B.J. Mangoang, Chair of the Washington State Party, was called by the press and quoted as saying, "The AFL-CIO speaks for itself" and as describing the newsletter as "an example of the old red-baiting divide, confuse and conquer." Mangoang's full statement was mailed to several hundred unions, along with Gus Hall's "What's at Stake."

The red-baiting fell flat on its face. National AFL-CIO spokesperson Denise Mitchell laughed when queried by Seattle's *Post-Intelligencer*. "I don't think it's a smart thing to try to win support of union members with something that sounds like it comes out of an old and very bad movie," she said.

Rick Bender, President of the state Labor Council, categorized Myers' effort as a "return to McCarthyism."

The second attack on labor was the local use of the nationwide Republican claim that Labor '96 was a move by "Big Labor Bosses." The Party representative to Jobs with Justice proposed a car caravan satirizing this claim and exposing Tate on the real

issues. The Jobs with Justice caravan was a big success, driving through Tate's district, picketing and leafleting two malls and the Puyallup State Fair grounds.

Throughout the campaign, a growing interest in radical solutions was evident, as was a lessening of fear of the left and acceptance of known Communists by labor and others. Many new members were recruited to the Party.

LABOR'S RENEWAL ■ The election story really begins in May 1995, when the United Farm Workers' eight-year campaign for a contract with Michelle winery was victorious. The machinists at Boeing began a strike climaxing in an outdoor rally in Everett on a cold November day. Six thousand strikers and supporters heard militant speakers, including the three newly elected top leaders of the AFL-CIO. The persistence and spirit of these two unions gave the labor movement fire.

Jobs with Justice, active in the state since 1993, began turning up the street heat against the Contract on America in 1995 as well, coordinating April demonstrations in five cities. In August, on two days notice, 150 turned out to say "No" to Pete Wilson who then had his eye on the Republican presidential nomination. In October, crowds in six cities responded to the Jobs with Justice call to rally against cuts in Medicare and Medicaid. Thirty-one demonstrators were arrested in Seattle in a takeover of Republican headquarters.

January '96 saw 3000 protesters with "Boot Newt" signs "welcoming" Gingrich to Seattle by blocking the entrance to the hotel where a \$1,000 a plate dinner was being held. In February the state AFL-CIO Council organized a Rally for Working Families that brought 10,000 to Olympia, the state capitol, on a rainy day.

The momentum made it possible for Labor '96 to hit the ground running. The years 1995 and 1996 have laid the foundation for growing militancy of the labor movement, for keeping street heat on the elected Democrats, and for further growth of our Party. □

Cuba Today

Tim Wheeler

They call Cuba the "jewel of the Antilles" and now I know why. Her mountains are emerald green. Her bays and lagoons are the bluest turquoise. Her beaches are like strings of lustrous pearls. And Havana! The crown jewel, the glowing ruby of Cuba's revolutionary heart.

Spend an afternoon in Varadero. Swim in that clear, blue-green sea, and you'll find yourself forgetting that there is trouble in the world. All this semi-tropical beauty, with palm trees swaying in the Gulf breeze, may explain the sunny, outgoing, humorous, seemingly carefree character of so many of the Cubans I met.

But let's get real. We all know the Cuban people have plenty of cares and lots of troubles. They have just gone through the most brutal five year period of the 35-year U.S. blockade of Cuba. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was like a force-10 hurricane that wiped out 80 percent of Cuba's export market. Deliveries of Soviet oil, machinery, spare parts and millions of tons of other vital goods were halted overnight. Cuba's gross domestic product plummeted by more than one-third. Manufacturing fell by two-thirds. Factories ran out of fuel and were closed and tens of thousands of workers were idled. There was the prospect of mass hunger.

The U.S. chose this critical moment to tighten the blockade with passage of the Torricelli Act. They calculated that this was the right moment to strangle the revolution and eliminate the hated island of socialism "ninety miles from home." Then last autumn Congress rammed through and President Clinton signed the Helms-Burton Act which makes foreign corporations subject to penalties under U.S. law if they trade with Cuba.

Jorge Mas Canosa, boss of the Cuban American National Foundation, was packing his bags for a triumphal return to Havana and the reopening of the casinos and brothels that were the hallmark of a bygone era.

But it has not worked out that way. Like those royal palms, the Cuban people bent before the hurri-

cane but they did not break. They fought more valiantly than ever in defense of their revolution. They tightened their belts and made self-sacrifices.

I was a guest of the Communist Party of Cuba during my one-week stay in November. My purpose was to learn more about the wellsprings of this most revolutionary people. To me, their courage and fighting genius is reminiscent of the defenders of Stalingrad.

The Party arranged interviews with working people, trade union leaders, members of the National Assembly and leaders of the Communist Party. I met Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, a founder of the Communist Party of Cuba and a hero of the Sierra Maestra. It was during a reception and rally to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the founding of the Public Administrators Union. The union's president, Norma Ortega, presented him with a medal of honor. The crowd erupted in thunderous applause when this beloved leader of the revolution stood to accept the honor.

Even when I went to Varadero Beach with my swimming suit, my hosts were young leaders of the Varadero Municipal Communist Party. They are spearheading Cuba's bold new foray into tourism with the construction of a string of five-star hotels just up the beach from the old Du Pont mansion. These magnificent hotels, now filling up with European, Canadian, and Latin American tourists, were built jointly with Spanish, German, and Mexican corporations. Cuba has opened the door for foreign investments.

Without exception, the people told me the economy is reviving and living conditions are gradually beginning to improve. Hardships remain, the most obvious being the grave shortage of mass transit. Every bus stop in Havana was packed with people waiting for the arrival of a "camel," a semi tractor-trailer converted into a bus with two humps, another Cuban invention. There are similar shortages and chronic breakdowns with elevators, water, electricity and telephone service.

But the improvements have brought a mood of relief and hopes for the future. As with everything in Cuba, the signs of economic revival are greeted as

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a victory in their struggle against the "colossus of the North." The people I interviewed were filled with pride in whatever project they were showing me. Their enthusiasm was most infectious. Yet they matter-of-factly described the hardships and shortages inflicted by the U.S. blockade. And then they would tell me, "We will never surrender" or "I am a revolutionary."

One source of strength for the Cuban people is their multiracial unity. I was struck by how well integrated Cuban society is with Cubans of African and European descent living and working side-by-side in harmony. The schools and Young Pioneer organizations are a "gorgeous mosaic" of Black, Brown, and white and their culture upholds the dignity of people of all backgrounds. This past year, the nation celebrated the life of Antonio Maceo, the great Cuban revolutionary hero, a comrade-in-arms of Jose Marti. Every classroom featured portraits of Maceo and the children learned of his contributions to the struggle for Cuban independence.

Walls in Cuba do double duty as surfaces for graffiti: "Si se puede!" (Yes we can!), "Patria o Muerte!!" (Fatherland or Death), "Hasta Victoria Siempre!" (Until the final victory). Portraits of Ernesto Che Guevara and small lovingly maintained shrines with marble busts of Jose Marti and Antonio Maceo are scattered everywhere.

Even the contests with nature become a challenge to the revolutionary cause. On the wall outside Party headquarters in San Antonio de los Baños was a poster with a defiant message for Hurricane Lillie: "We will recover and rebuild everything!" it said.

One hand-painted sign above a grocery store near my hotel in the Almendares municipality proclaimed: "La Capital—un eterno Baragua!" My interpreter explained that Mangos de Baragua was the scene of a battle near Santiago de Cuba led by Antonio Maceo, the African Cuban revolutionary, during the war for Cuban independence from Spain.

NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE & SOCIALISM ■ The eternal struggle for Cuba's national sovereignty has penetrated deeply into the souls of the Cuban people. Cuba is one of those nations where the socialist revolution and the fight for national independence are linked inseparably. Cuba's silver medal winner in fencing at the Atlanta Olympics, Ivan Trevejo Perez put it squarely. Like so many of Cuba's athletic heroes who won 25 medals in Atlanta, he is of African descent. I met him together with members

of Cuba's Gold medal women's volleyball team at the High Performance Athletic Training Center in the suburbs of Havana.

"Our victories were made possible by the revolution," he told me. "The fact that I am here, a member of Cuba's national fencing team, is because of socialism ... We try to compete with honor as is typical of the Cubans."

National Assembly Delegate Maria Ducas Megret took me to visit the Young Pioneer palace at Ciudad Libertad (Freedom City) in the Marianao municipality of Havana which she represents. Freedom City was once called Fort Columbia. It was built by the U.S. to billet troops when the U.S. replaced Spain as the colonial occupier at the end of the Spanish-American War of 1898. It was Batista's last stronghold. Now it is a center for children's sports and cultural activities.

Grete Gil, 12, displayed a plate she had made with an excellent likeness of Jose Marti. "Jose Marti made speeches in Tampa and New York calling for Cuban independence," she told me. "He died fighting for freedom because we were ruled first by Spain and then the United States."

Nivalbo Ortega, president of the Antero Regalado Cooperative Farm near San Antonio de los Baños showed my interpreter, Adelina Hilton and me the state-of-the-art cultivation houses imported from Israel where tons of tomatoes are grown. With his pocket knife, he cut open one of the tomatoes to show us how succulent they are. "Before the revolution," he said, "we had millions of hectares of land that served only the needs of the wealthy. Now our task is to guarantee a balanced diet for the Cuban people," he said.

The farm is equipped with a fleet of aging Soviet tractors. Ortega sighed when I asked him about spare parts. "We make them," he said.

In fact, a young farm worker was operating a turret lathe in the farm's machine shop while we were there. The Cuban people have become world famous for their ingenuity in keeping aging vehicles rolling. Chevies, vintage 1955, trundle along the Malecon, many of them still polished to a fare-the-well. Now they are applying these skills to aging Soviet Volgas, Zil trucks and motorcycles. It is a symbol of their defiance of the blockade, an example of their "Si se puede" (Yes, we can) spirit.

The inventiveness is not limited to fixing broken down tractors and cars. I visited the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology at the Scien-

tific Pole in the western suburbs of Havana. I was greeted by Sonia Gonzalez Blanco, a biochemist and chemical engineer, a member of the team that developed the first vaccine against meningitis-B using recombinant DNA methods.

SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS ■ The center has also developed recombinant vaccines for hepatitis-B and other killer diseases marketed under the brand name Heber-Biotec S.A. The Center developed an anti-coagulant called Streptokinase to break up blood clots in heart attack victims. They have developed a remarkable epidermal growth cream to stimulate healing of burn victims. They are in the thick of the search for advanced treatments of HIV-AIDs and have developed a fast, simple, accurate kit for detection of this killer that is decimating Africa and the sub-continent of Asia.

Gonzalez told me of the ordeal she and other Cuban researchers went through to get U.S. visas to attend a world conference on meningitis in Baltimore last summer. "We did not get our U.S. visas until the day before we had to depart," she said. "But we did get there and we shared our knowledge of meningitis with the rest of the world.

"Lives are in the balance," she added. "We have some medications that are needed by people in the United States. U.S. pharmaceutical companies produce many high quality medications that we need here. It is an opportunity for an exchange and we should not miss it."

Gonzalez is the secretary of the Communist Party at the Center where 220 of the 850 researchers and production workers are Party members. There is a branch of the Young Communist League with 400 members reflecting the youth of the workers.

"This center is a victory of the revolution," she told me. "There are other countries in Latin America with more resources than we have. But they do not have centers like this engaged in molecular biology and genetic engineering. Socialism made it possible."

One afternoon, we drove to La Maqueta de la Capital (The Model of the Capital) in the seaside Miramar municipality of Havana. This is a vast room-sized model of Havana designed by a team of volunteer architects. Miguel Coyula, one of the architects, with a pointer gave me an impassioned lecture on the architectural glories of his city and explained the plan they have drawn up to restore it. I told him that I had visited the house where Cuba's most famed artist, Wifredo Lam, once lived. The

current owner, Rita Rios had told me of the grassroots effort in her neighborhood to restore the house. Coyula's eyes brightened. "The Wifredo Lam house is the kind of restoration project we are trying to encourage," he said. The people of Cuba seem to understand that the hardships they endure are the result of open and covert warfare, that the U.S. is laying siege and will not relent until they say "uncle." There is pride that Cuba, a nation of only 11 million people, stands like David against Goliath while so many other capitalist powers grovel before the "sole remaining superpower."

STRATEGY FOR SURVIVAL ■ Yet patriotism, no matter how inspired, is not enough. A people will resist only if they are organized, only if they have confidence in their leadership. There must be a strategy and a battle plan.

Jorge Lezcano, President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the National Assembly of the People's Power, a graphics worker by trade and for 10 years leader of the Communist Party in the Province of Havana told me, "There is no way that our revolution could have survived for 38 years without the allegiance of the people and their confidence in the leadership."

One aim of the blockade, he said, is to starve the Cuban people into submission. Another is to isolate Cuba internationally. Yet Cuba, he said, is respected worldwide. In many ways, he said, the country's prestige has never been higher. He cited the ovation for President Fidel Castro at the World Summit on Hunger in Rome when he assailed the U.S. for blocking language in the final statement calling for the eradication of hunger. It was followed by Fidel's audience with John Paul II and the announcement that the Pope will visit Cuba.

Lezcano said the world-wide revulsion against the Helms-Burton Act proves that U.S. imperialism seriously overreached with its attempt to impose legal sanctions on the corporations and banks of third countries that trade with Cuba – a brazen exercise in extra-territoriality. "We need a wider and stronger movement to end the blockade," he said. "How long will the nations of the world tolerate the Helms-Burton Act, this sword of Damocles hanging over their heads" he asked?

He continued, "If the European Union, Japan, and other nations continue to pass laws as they did in Canada prohibiting compliance with Helms-Burton, it will amount to concrete rejection of the U.S.

law. It will help convince President Clinton to face up to what is going on – the complete isolation of the U.S.”

Havana is now a destination for business executives looking for investment opportunities in Cuba. Foreign dignitaries, the most recent Canada Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, are visiting Cuba. Axworthy is among the sharpest critics of Helms-Burton and Canadian trade with Cuba has grown to more than \$500 million with firms like Sherritt International and York Medical investing heavily in Cuban nickel mining, oil exploration and biotechnology.

Cuba is also a cultural Mecca. While I was there, Cuba's famed National Ballet hosted a world festival of ballet featuring sold-out performances by prima ballerinas and principal dancers, several of them Cubans who are dancing with U.S. ballet companies. Alicia Alonso, founder of the National Ballet of Cuba was greeted as a heroine. Cuba's annual film festival of Latin American cinematographers was scheduled for early December.

Next summer, Cuba will host the World Youth Festival at the end of July. It will be a unique festival in which thousands of youth from around the world will stay in the homes of Cuban families during the festival's activities. Immediately following the festival, from August 6-8, the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC) will host the "International Conference on the Workers' Front Against Neo-Liberalism and Globalization." Trade unionists, community and other grassroots activists from at least 49 countries around the world will participate.

The Cuban people are not only organized, they are active politically with meetings, rallies and demonstrations that have welded a collective fight-back. The activism has instilled a feeling of unity and strength that reaches down to the grassroots.

Havana was preparing during my visit for a mass march through the Plaza de la Revolucion to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces. On display in the plaza were tanks, armored personnel carriers, fighter jets, helicopters and SAM missiles. Large delegations of cadets from military academies throughout Latin America had come to join in the parade – reflecting the high prestige of Cuba's armed forces around the world. An estimated million Cubans joined the march including contingents of farm and factory workers, men and women, armed with AK-47 assault rifles. They are members of the workers' militias.

A GROWING PARTY ▣ At the headquarters of the Communist Party of Cuba, Orlando Sardinias, Deputy Chief of the Department of Organization said the Party has 761,900 members, one of every 12 Cubans. They belong to 55,509 clubs. More than 40 percent of the members are workers.

"Our Party is organized mainly in the workplaces but we also have clubs in the neighborhoods made up mostly of retirees," he said. "In the past four years, the Party grew at the rate of 46,000 members per year."

But in an earlier period, only 30,000 new members joined each year, he said.

I say this because it is happening precisely during the so-called 'special period' after the collapse of the Soviet Union. We might have expected people to abandon the Party. In fact it has been the reverse. People have come closer to the Party during this time of hardship and danger to the revolution.

He told me that factory and farm workers in Cuba, including non-Party members, nominate the best workers from their ranks for Party membership. Furthermore, if a Party member falls into disfavor for unsatisfactory performance, the workers in his or her shop complain and the offender is criticized or even removed from the Party.

"It is our way of insuring the close links between the Party and the people and making each member accountable," he said. "The people consider the Party their party." At the last Congress, he said, the Party's Constitution was changed so that religious believers can now belong. "The basic requirement for membership is that the candidate believe in and support the revolution and work hard to improve the lives of the people." he said.

It was the Party, he added, that mobilized when the "special period" struck. Every mass organization – the trade union movement, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution – was summoned to action. There were mass meetings in every factory and farm and in every one of Cuba's 169 municipalities.

It was confirmed by Pedro Ross Leal, President of the Cuban Confederation of Workers (CTC) who granted me an hour-long interview in his office at CTC headquarters in Old Havana. His office has a sweeping view of the beautiful city. "During these difficult times, our trade unions maintained the unity of the workers in their struggle for national

dignity and independence," he said. "Everything we did, even that which is not purely socialist, was done to save the revolution and advance toward socialism."

The first task, he said, was to come up with a set of emergency measures to stabilize the country after the devastating impact of the Soviet collapse. Every laid-off worker was guaranteed 60 percent of his or her wage.

The CTC organized meetings in every workplace and in all the municipalities. The first meetings were to discuss and ratify measures for dealing with the crisis. At these "Workers' Parliaments," 78,000 of them, the overwhelming consensus was that the main social gains of the revolution must be preserved – free universal health care and free public education. Other emergency measures included food rationing to guarantee an adequate diet. "They also agreed on the proposal to open Cuba to joint ventures with foreign investors – but these ventures must protect the trade union rights and social security rights of the workers."

CAPITAL TO BUILD SOCIALISM ■ The profits from these joint ventures are split 50-50 and the entire program of foreign investment is carried out under strict supervision by the Cuban government to insure the rights of the unionized workers. The aim is to generate precious new sources of capital to build socialism, Ross said. It is in striking contrast to Russia and other formerly socialist nations of eastern Europe where socialized property has been privatized at fire auction prices with foreign banks and corporations gobbling up their basic industries.

There has been heavy stress on the creation of a new tourist industry, creation of the Basic Units of Cooperative Production in agriculture, and the legalizing of self-employment and permitting the circulation of foreign currencies including U.S. dollars in the Cuban economy. Ross said the Cuban government is well aware of the corruption that comes with these measures and steps have been taken to fight it. In the tourist industry for example, workers have access to foreign currency in the form of tips. Cubans with relatives in the U.S. receive cash gifts. A movement has been started to encourage these workers to contribute part of their money to programs that benefit all the Cuban people.

A second round of meetings were called "Efficiency Assemblies" and the aim was to sharply increase the productivity rate in the Cuban econo-

my. Jobless workers or those not necessary in one branch of the economy were shifted to other growing sectors such as tourism, joint ventures, and cooperative agriculture. Ross stressed that some of these measures were bitter medicine forced upon them by reality and still have an experimental quality about them. "Cuba has been forced to struggle for efficiency without sacrificing social justice," he said. "The workers are living with this situation, how to insert ourselves into the global market."

Some measures, like the creation of a private farmers' market has given the people a "glimpse of capitalism" he said. Prices for vegetables, poultry, meat and other foods in the private market have been very high and there were calls for price controls. But controls are not permitted under the law that created the farmers' market. It is in sharp contrast to the socialized food markets where prices are regulated and people buy rationed staple foods.

All the elements of the plan for confronting the "special period" were discussed and approved, he said. "The workers were able to see that even under the worst conditions the revolution would guarantee their fundamental rights. The workers have remained on the side of the revolution."

Norma Ortega, General Secretary of the National Union of Public Administration Workers greeted me during a rally and reception to celebrate the 35 anniversary of the founding of the union. She said she is a member of the executive committee of the Latin American Confederation of State Employees Unions, which meets regularly, most recently in Montevideo, Uruguay, last October.

We discuss how we can organize to fight the neo-liberal policies that are being imposed throughout the world – privatization of government services, mass layoffs of government workers, cutbacks in social welfare benefits, the destruction of our unions. They terminate state services more and more under the pretext that these services are worthless. It means extreme misery for the poor, the disabled, for senior citizens and children. One of their strategies is to co-opt the leaders of Public Employee unions by appointing them to positions in government. An example is Colombia where the present Labor Minister used to be the Secretary General of the Trade Union Movement.

Many of these policies are dictated, she said, by the U.S.-dominated International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, a fanatical advocate of "shock therapy," stripping the people of a safety net, priva-

tizing all nationalized industries and sharply increasing the wealth of the elite. "We could have gone down that path," she said. "We would be like all the other countries of the Third World where unemployment, hunger and homelessness are rampant. Instead we chose the path of resistance. If we had surrendered, we would have lost everything."

Everyone at the rally was wearing buttons sent to her by a sister union in Puerto Rico, that read, "Yo creo en la solidaridad." (I believe in solidarity).

There are also Cuba's elected officials such as Maria Ducas Megret who took me on a walking tour of the district she represents in the National Assembly. A young woman of African descent, Maria Ducas was greeted everywhere we went. Her constituents rushed up to embrace her and to greet a visiting U.S. journalist. She took me to the Pilar House, a modernistic concrete block building with eight apartments.

She introduced me to members of a volunteer micro-brigade of residents who, with the help of an architect and with supplies from the government, had constructed the building. Several members of the brigade then moved into the apartments. These construction micro-brigades have been formed throughout Cuba. They are an example of the initiatives by the Party and the government for dealing with the critical shortages during this "special period."

ECONOMIC GROWTH ■ Throughout Havana, neighborhoods have commandeered vacant lots, median strips, and their own backyards to plant victory gardens. There are herds of goats everywhere in Cuba today, even within Havana itself, to supply milk and meat.

In early January, Cuba's Minister of the Economy and Planning, Jose Luis Rodriguez reported to Cuba's National Assembly that Cuba's economy soared 7.8 percent in 1996 with double digit growth rates in a dozen key sectors of the economy. Sugar production rose 33.6 percent to 4.4 million tons and overall agricultural production was up 17.3 percent; tobacco production rose 30.1 percent; nickel production zoomed 36.7 percent; oil refining increased by 31.2 percent; construction, including the building of a string of five-star hotels, rose 30.8 percent; tourism's net contribution to the Cuban economy went up by 50 percent.

And the standard of living for the masses of the people is also rising once again. Personal income went up by 11.4 percent and the average monthly

wage rose from 196 pesos to 203 pesos. Consumer prices fell 4.0 percent.

A day or so after the economic report, Carlos Dolres, Cuba's Minister of Public Health reported to the National Assembly that Cuba's infant mortality rate fell from 9.4 per 1,000 live births in 1995 to 7.9 per 1,000 live births in 1996 placing Cuba in the top 20 nations of the world, a stunning victory for Cuba's socialized medical system and a tribute to the country's delivery of pre-natal and post-natal care. Cuba's infant mortality rate is now lower than that of the U.S.

Dolres told the National Assembly,

This is a quality-of-life indicator that measures more than anything the economic social and cultural development of a country ... In spite of the genocidal blockade that, like a noose tries to asphyxiate us, the guarantee of health and life for our people is maintained.

The two reports confirmed what I saw. Cuba is beginning to recover, yes. But Rodriguez also warned that the country faces grave difficulties. Cuba is caught in the classical squeeze that afflicts all nations that depend on cash crops. The price of her main export, sugar, is low. The costs of her imports are high. The cost of oil rocketed 50 percent last year.

Ironically, the economic recovery itself imposes new difficulties. Cuba must float loans from foreign banks to finance the expanding economy. And these banks charge Cuba interest rates sometimes twice what they charge other customers. "The economic situation in 1996 was affected by the volume of short-term, high-interest financing, which fuels a growing debt," Rodriguez warned.

There is a direct link to the Helms-Burton law which banks cite as justification for the inflated interest rates they charge Cuba. Most governments have thumbed their noses at Clinton's envoy, Stuart Eisenstat, as he hustles around the world trying to bully countries to comply with Helms-Burton. But some banks have indeed been intimidated into withdrawing loans needed to finance Cuba's 1997 sugar crop.

This underlines the urgency of building a far broader and more active movement of solidarity with Cuba to fight for ending the blockade and establishing normal trade and diplomatic relations. That movement needs to stress the immorality of the blockade. But it must also stress that normal U.S.-Cuba relations are in the interest of the American people. □

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